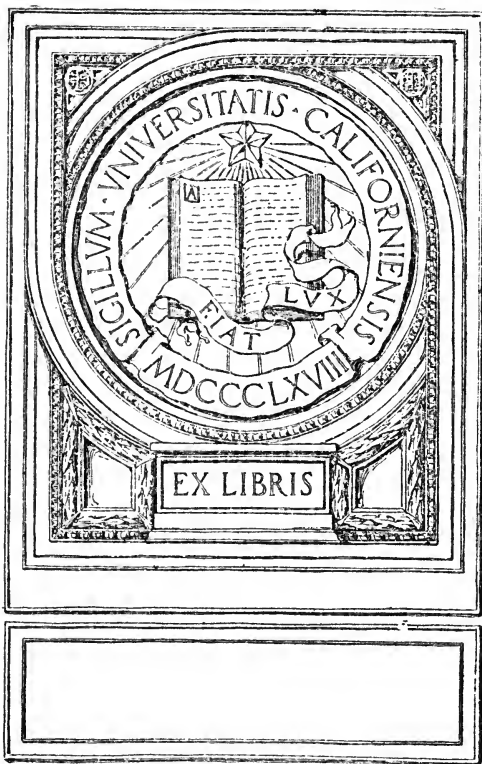
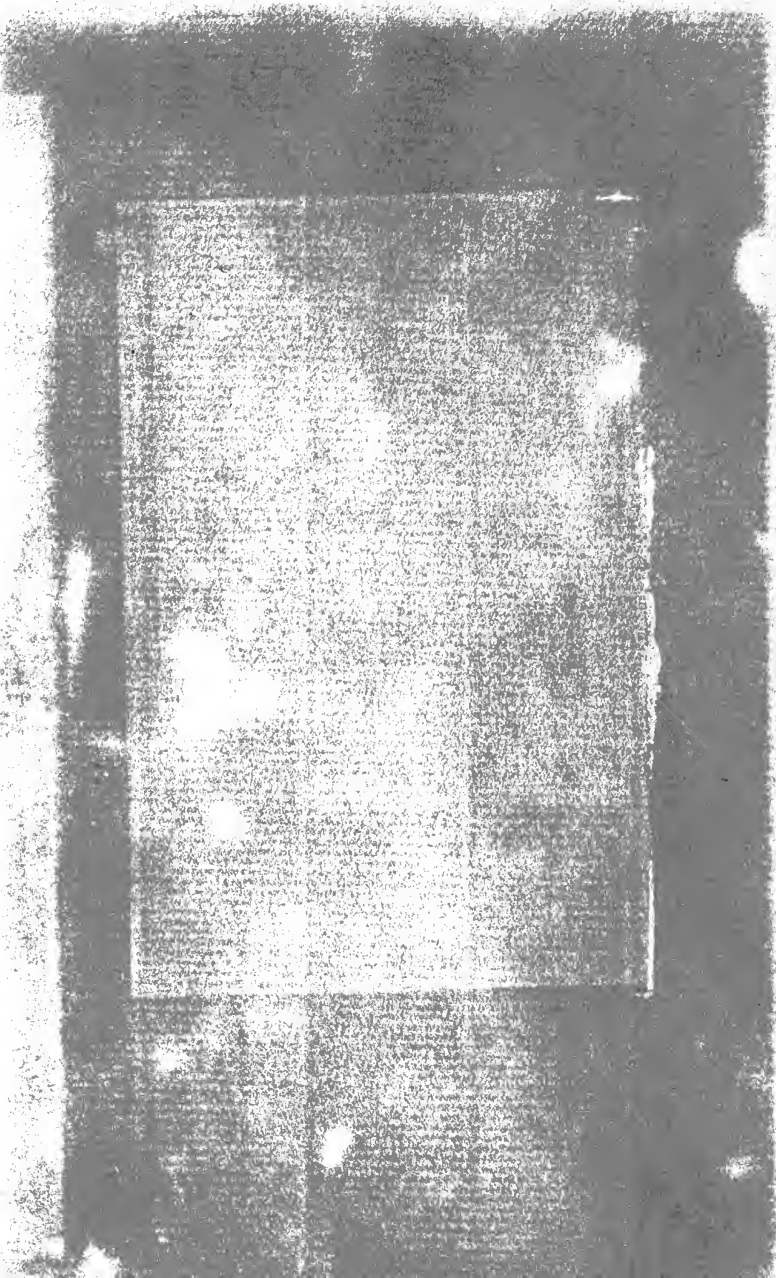


*A RENEGADE
AND
OTHER TALES*

BY
MARTHA WOLFENSTEIN





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Author of "Idyls of the Gass"



PHILADELPHIA

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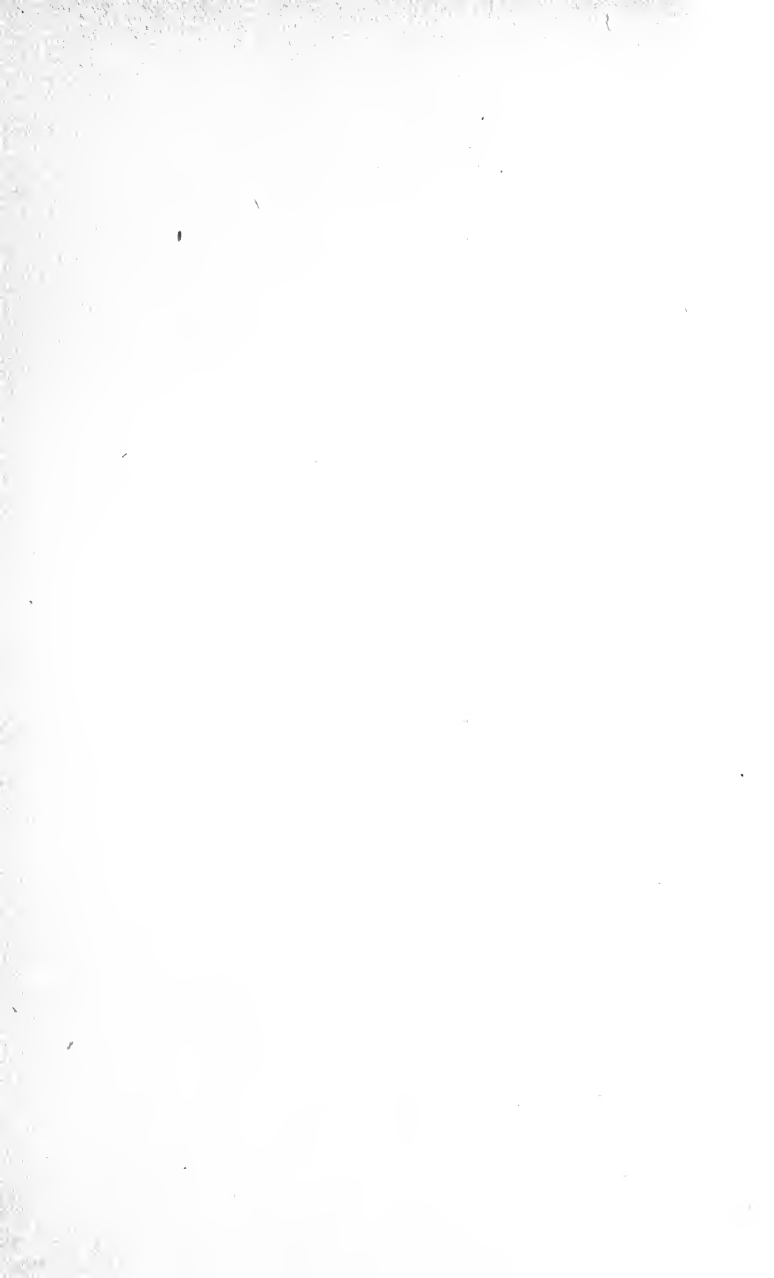
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. A RENEGADE	9
II. DOVID AND RESEL.....	45
III. LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL	75
IV. A SINNER IN ISRAEL.....	105
V. NITTEL-NACHT	131
VI. A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON.....	151
VII. A GOY IN THE GOOD PLACE.....	161
VIII. GENENDEL THE PIOUS.....	183
IX. A MONK FROM THE GHETTO.....	203
X. GRANDMOTHER SPEAKS: CHAYAH	231
XI. GRANDMOTHER SPEAKS: OUR FRIEND....	259
XII. BABETTE	287
XIII. THE BEAST	307

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I

A RENEGADE

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

I

A RENEGADE

Schneider, Schneider,
Meck, Meck, Meck.

The quiet village street echoed with this taunting cry. The shouters were half-grown boys, running in pursuit of a taller one, who fled before them, casting strangely terrified looks behind. At the corner of the street leading into the Jews' quarter, he ran full against a short, fat boy, bounding back as though he had collided with a rubber cushion, and in a moment his pursuers were upon him.

"Come on, let's fight 'em, Peretz!" cried the shorter boy. The other glared for a moment at his tormentors, breathed hard, clenched his fists, then suddenly

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

grasped his companion by the arm, and, dragging him along, ran down the Jews' quarter into the open door-way of the synagogue yard. He quickly slammed the gate and bolted it. The two boys stood panting and glaring at each other. "They are right," burst forth the shorter, "they are right that they call us Jews cowards! Why didst not fight 'em?"

For answer Peretz lunged forward, grasped his companion by the shirt and the belt of his trousers, tossed him up above his head, shook him as a dog would a cat, and then gently laid him on the ground at his feet. The boy—his name was Jacob, euphoniously called Yaikew in the Ghetto—lay for a moment as if stunned.

"What kind of craziness is this?" demanded he, hotly, scrambling to his feet. "Thou needst not show *me* what a strong man thou art."

"Dost still think I was afraid?" cried the other, passionately. Then he turned

suddenly away and hid his face against the wall. Yaikew looked in amazement and saw that he was trembling.

“What ails thee, Peretz?” he asked more gently. “Has anybody done thee a harm?”

“It is always so; the people all think I’m a coward,” was the tremulous reply.

Yaikew shrugged his shoulders, and returned with a sage air: “What should they think?”

Peretz cast a cautious glance around, and drew from his bosom an old, torn book.

“See,” said he, holding it fondly, “this is why I don’t fight.”

“What is that? What dost thou mean?” questioned Yaikew.

“If I fight, might they not tear my shirt and find it?”

“What,” cried Yaikew, “for an old, torn book thou lettest them torment thee!”

He took it in his hands, turned its yellow pages wonderingly, and finally added:

"What is this, anyhow? It isn't Hebrew."

"It's Greek," whispered Peretz.

"Greek," echoed Yaikew. "Where didst thou get it?"

"Sh—sh," warned the other, in fright. "The schoolmaster who lived at the mill last summer gave it to me, for blacking his boots and carrying water. In the evenings I taught him to read out of the Pentateuch, and he taught me out of this—the Iliad."

"Ili-ahd," mimicked Yaikew, smiling. "There must be fine things written in this book that thou wearest it in thy bosom."

"God forgive me the sin," cried Peretz, "but there is naught so beautiful in all our holy tongue as is written in this little book. I could not live without it. Wai!

my master would burn it in a minute, and my mother, Yaikew—she is very pious. It would grieve her that I read profane books,” and he laid the volume carefully within his open shirt, and pressed his hands lovingly upon it.

Peretz was fifteen years old, and for the last two years apprenticed to the village tailor. His widowed mother, the poorest woman in the Gass [Jews' Street], picked up a scanty living at any odd work that she could find. She had sent him to the Ghetto school until he was Bar-Mitzwah (at the age of thirteen).

“’Tis time that he begin to earn something, and he has no head for learning,” decided the old teacher, for Peretz dreamed idly over the fine, logical intricacies of the Talmud text.

The great dry-goods merchant of the Gass took him into his store to teach him the business, but in a month Reb Noach

sent him home with the message: "Tell thy mother thou art as fit for business as I am for a tight-rope walker." As Reb Noach had a club foot, and weighed some two hundred pounds, this likeness was fully convincing.

Although Peretz had been with his master, the tailor, almost two years, he had as yet learned little of the craft. His principal occupation was that of minding the children and doing chores, for which select service he received no wages.

With his lank limbs protruding from his ragged clothes, an old rimless cap pressed upon his black, curling hair, his pallid face and black eyes red-rimmed with nightly reading, he was the butt and jest of all mischievous boys. The little cowards took particular delight in tormenting him as soon as they discovered that he would not fight.

The very next day after the incident related, Peretz's master sent him to deliver

A RENEGADE

a coat to Count Reichenberg, whose estate was an hour's walk from the village. Peretz went along reciting parts of his beloved Iliad to himself. His memory failing him at a certain passage, he sat down and looked up the verse. It was beautiful. So was the next and the following one, and in the combat of Hector and Ajax he forgot his errand, his wretched life, and the whole world about him. Noticing presently that the lines in his book were growing dim, he looked up and saw to his dismay that it was evening. He remembered that his master had particularly urged him to hasten, as the coat was for a fancy-dress ball which the Count was to give that evening, and the tailor had taken great pride in freshening it up for the occasion. Peretz snatched up his parcel and ran at the top of his speed.

Lamps were already twinkling on the lawn when, frightened and panting, he arrived at the palace. He delivered the par-

cel, and was about to steal away, when a valet appeared and ordered Peretz to follow him, as the Count wished to see the messenger.

Peretz followed. Pale with fright, he appeared in the door-way of the Count's dressing-room.

"Thou damned rascally scoundrel!" roared the Count, a thick-set man, with a round face, now red with rage. "I have a mind to have thee flogged, thee and thy master together. What does the man mean by keeping me waiting? Tell thy master that I'll have him run out of the village. I'll ruin his trade. I won't pay him a Kreuzer." Peretz trembled at sight of the Count's rage.

"It isn't my master's fault," he stammered. "He sent me early in the afternoon. I forgot myself."

"So!" cried the Count. "Loafing in the tavern! Pitching pennies! What!"

Peretz's pride was stung.

"I was reading, your Highness," replied he, quietly.

"What! Reading! Liar! What wast thou reading? Show it to me? Where is the book?"

Peretz paled again. He had betrayed his secret. He would lose his beloved book, perhaps his place, and be again a care and disgrace to his mother. He undid his ragged shirt, pulled out the tattered volume, and two great tears welled up under his lids as he reluctantly held it forth to the Count. The Count glanced at the book, then at Peretz, and shook his head incredulously.

"Dost mean to say, boy, that thou canst read this?"

All trace of anger had vanished from his face, which now shone with interest and curiosity.

"Here," continued he, "let me hear. Read something," and he thrust the open volume into the boy's hands.

Peretz grasped the book joyfully. Perhaps the Count would let him keep it, after all. He began to read. Passage after passage flowed glibly from his lips.

The Count listened, his face a mixture of surprise, incredulity, and pleasure.....

His guests were surprised presently to see him appear in earnest conversation with a ragged, barefooted Jewish boy, whom he shook by the hand at parting as if he were his equal.

"You seem to have discovered a new species of game, Count," remarked a guest, laughingly.

"Hunting is not my pet vice, Madame," returned the Count. "Am I not known as an inveterate collector of gems? You may congratulate me. I have just discovered a rare diamond."

That same evening Schedel Neuer, with Peretz beside her, stood within the rabbi's house, crying eagerly:

“Talk it out of him, Rebbe Leben! He wants to go to Vienna. The Count wants to send him to the High School. Why should he become a wise man? Will that bring money into the house? If he learned nothing out of our dear, holy books, will he learn out of those without a word of Yiddish [Hebrew] in them? He dare not go, Rebbe Leben. We dare not take it from the Goy [Gentile]. There will no good come of it. Why should he learn all the wickedness that is written in those books? Not my father, peace be with him, nor my grandfather could read a word that was not written in the Prayer-Book. They were pious men, but he has it from his father. God forgive me that I must confess it.”

The rabbi, a young man, who had been but two years in the village, and had what the older people called “new notions in his head,” at once sided with Peretz.

“You may take my word for it, Frau Neuer,” said he, “there is much wisdom

contained in those books that you so despise. It would be better if more in the Gass would devote themselves to their study."

But Schedel was firm in her opposition.

"There will no good come of it," she insisted. "We dare not take it from the Gentile."

The younger folks sided with Peretz.

"Wilt thou trample thy good fortune under foot? Times have changed, and the Jew and the Christian are now equal," they urged. The old people shook their heads wisely, and sighed:

"The Jew and the Christian can never agree. There will no good come of it."

But the outcome was that Peretz went to Vienna to study, under the protection of Count Reichenberg.

His letters were full of hope and happiness; everything was pleasant and easy; he was already beginning to earn money, for

he had formed a class of factory men and women whom he was teaching to read and write. He sent his mother all of his earnings that he could spare, and begged her not to work so hard.

In two years Peretz was admitted to the University, and after this he was able to support his mother in ease and comfort.

"Nu, Schedel," said her younger friends, "dost still wish to have thy Peretz home and minding the tailor's children? Thou livest at thine ease like a countess."

But Schedel looked up sadly from her knitting and complained, "What have I of my son when he is in Vienna and I am here?"

"Schedel is a discontented old grumbler," they said of her; but the old people sighed, and said sympathetically, "She has her cares."

One day the neighbors found Schedel with a letter clasped tightly in her hand,

lying as if dead on the floor. They laid her upon the bed, and sent for old Dr. Pinkus, but in spite of all efforts she remained unconscious. Then they sent for the rabbi, who read the letter. It was as follows:

My beloved Mother:

It near breaks my heart to write this, for I know how it will grieve thee. Didst thou but know what pain and struggle I have gone through, thou wouldst pity and not condemn me. What I am about to do *must* be, or all my striving all my life were in vain.

Mother, dear, it is only a form—an empty nothing. My soul still clings to thee, to our dear Gass, to the beloved friends at home. But wouldst thou that I come back and go to work for the tailor again; or at best earn a scanty living by teaching at ten Kreuzers an hour? Shall I, like Dr. Pinkus, smother my brain, my body, my soul, within the Ghetto walls? Were he not a Jew he could to-day be Professor at the medical college here. And poor Aaron Silberstein—is he not grown bent and gray and miserable in his wretched little shop? He might to-day be upon the Supreme Bench of Austria, had he but consented to be baptized. I tell thee it is obstinacy, nothing but obstinacy! A short ceremony, a few drops of water—can they change the soul? Or does true religion consist in what one eats, or in the strap one binds upon the forehead, or that one prays

A RENEGADE

in Hebrew? In the end they are alike,—Judaism and Christianity,—both for the betterment, the happiness of mankind. All the rest is trifling—empty form. But we cannot transform the world. If the majority have prejudices and insist that we become Christians, it is absurd to stand like petulant children. It is madness to try to run our heads through a stone wall. Obstinacy, I say, sheer obstinacy! And I cannot sacrifice position, ease, comfort, wealth, hope, ambition—aye, fame (thou dost not dream of the heights to which I may aspire)—for an empty form. As a Jew in Vienna I cannot earn my salt. Moreover, my beloved friend and benefactor, Count Reichenberg, is being constantly reproached for his protection of a Jew, and must leave me to my fate unless I change. A thousand times rather death than back to the Ghetto! It is useless to try to dissuade me. The first steps are already taken. God help thee to see it in the right light. We shall yet be happy together, darling mother, till a hundred years. Dost remember how thou didst laugh and wonder that the Countess has her breakfast in bed? Thou wilt live like the Countess, mother, with a maid to save thy dear, tired feet every step, and silken dresses, and a new Sabbath cap for every week in the year.

Write that thou forgivest and still lovest thy affectionate son till death.

PERETZ.

P. S.—My letters are to be addressed to Father Ignatius Becker, at the Brother House of St. Benedict.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

The news spread like wildfire through the Gass. The younger folks shrugged their shoulders, sighed, and looked wise.

"Wai!" lamented the old folks, wringing their hands. "A traitor in Israel. Poor Schedel!"

The doctor said there was no hope for the old woman. She would take neither food nor drink, and lay for days in a deep lethargy. On the seventh day of her illness another letter arrived. In fear and apprehension, yet half hoping to arouse her, the doctor took her hand and said:

"Frau Schedel, here is a letter for you."

Schedel for the first time opened her eyes.

"Isn't he done yet?" moaned she, feebly. "Read! read!" The doctor opened the letter. It contained only a few lines and a ten-Gulden gold piece. He laid them both within her hand. Schedel slowly lifted her hand and looked with dim,

bleared eyes at the coin. Then suddenly, with a cry, she sat up in bed.

"From him!" she cried with a shrill voice. "Does he think he can buy me as they have bought him—with a piece of gold?" And she flung the coin from her with such force that it crashed through the window and rolled on the pavement outside.

The neighbors stood around awaiting her death; the friends wept; the "pious women" were in readiness; but toward evening the wrinkle on the old doctor's forehead began to smooth out, for Schedel opened her eyes and said:

"Why do you sit here, Herr Doctor Leben? Waiting for me to die? I shall not die yet."

"It all lies with you," replied he.

"I tell you I will live!" assured Schedel.

"She will live," said the doctor, and went home to his bed. He had hardly

closed the door when Schedel said to the woman who was watching with her:

“Belè Leben, bring me that gold piece.”

The woman gave her the coin, and Schedel placed it under her pillow. The next morning she breakfasted on bread and milk.

Every seventh day following this a letter containing a gold piece arrived, and with each new coin Schedel seemed to gain strength. Yet she grew thinner and paler every day; only her eyes seemed to live, and they gleamed with a strange, wild energy. She kept the coins carefully wrapped in an old piece of silk, and, when she looked at them, she would laugh a low, mirthless laugh that terrified those who heard her. She who had proudly refused all their help during her days of bitterest poverty now lived upon the soups and invalid dishes the neighbors sent her.

“Let me buy thee a bit of roasting

meat," urged her neighbor Belè one day.
"Thou needest it for thy strength."

"Have I money for roasting meat?" replied Schedel, in surprise. Belè flushed red with anger.

"Hast thou not thy pocket heaped full of gold, so that one hears it jingle a mile off?" she cried.

Schedel looked at her quietly for a moment, then said:

"If I were lying out on the street and dying, and one should say, For a penny of that gold thou canst buy a drop of water to save thy life, I would not buy it."

"Would one believe," said the people, contemptuously, "that Schedel would turn out such a miser?"

"One does not become a miser overnight," said Dr. Pinkus. "There is something wrong with Schedel. She is planning something."

The morning after the sixth gold piece had arrived, the Gass awoke to the as-

tounding news that Schedel was gone and her house locked up.....

Two weeks later an old woman, haggard, footsore, and travel-stained, joined a great throng crowding into the portals of St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna.

"Art sure," asked she of the Jewish lad who was leading her by the hand, "that he who is to be baptized to-day is the young man Neuer? It must be a mistake."

"Shall I not know, when nothing else has been talked about for a month? Think not it is for him that all these people have come. Only last month, when the old law came in again, and we Jews were forbidden to own land, three got baptized, but not a cock crowed about them. The people have come to see the Kaiser. He himself is to be godfather on account of his friend the Count. Such a thing has never been before. My mother says she doesn't know whether it is an honor or a disgrace

for the Jews. Anyhow, it will be a fine sight;" and the boy, stimulated by the promise of ten Kreuzers, began to elbow his way through the crowd, and dragged the old woman with him into the Kaiser Chapel, already crowded to suffocation, where the ceremony was to take place.

In front, near the altar, on which a thousand candles glittered, were invited guests of the nobility, and, in a place of honor, Count Reichenberg and his family. Suddenly a glorious burst of organ music shook the air, the chancel door opened, and forth came the cardinal and bishops and a procession of priests, followed by choir-boys, some swinging censers. Then came the convert, led by two acolytes. He was covered from the neck to the ground with a sweeping robe of white, his face pale as death, his black eyes downcast.

When all were assembled, the chancel door again opened; a handsome, pleasant-faced young man entered and stood beside

the convert. The church was hushed with awe. It was the Emperor Franz Josef of Austria!

Now the chant began, which the cardinal himself intoned. Then all again was silence, while the convert uttered the confession of faith, bowed his head to receive the holy water, raised a crucifix on high, and pressed it to his lips.

It was done! The people were about to withdraw, when a shrill voice in the congregation cried suddenly, "Wait!"

An old woman, dishevelled, trembling, and wild-eyed, scrambled over the low altar rail.

"Wait!" she cried, with a low, mad laugh. "I've a gift for the newly baptized child. I've come afoot all the way from Maritz to bring it. See," she added, extending her tattered shoe, "not enough leather there to cut a little patch."

"She is mad," whispered the priests, and darted forward to seize her. But in

a moment Peretz stood beside her with uplifted hand.

“She is my mother,” he murmured.

At sight of him the old woman uttered a fearful shriek.

“Did you see him, all of you—did you see him kiss the crucifix? Pfui! Thou wretch! Accursed Meshummed [renegade]! Here thou hast thy dirty gold,” and she flung a handful of coin full into the young man’s face. The blows seamed the flesh with livid white, which in a moment turned purple. The people stared.

“A maniac,” “She raves,” “Bind her,” buzzed the crowd.

But she had flung herself on her son’s neck, and was wailing,

“Have I hurt thee, Peretz, my life? I did not mean it. O, the poor bruised face,” and she stroked the red spots gently with her withered fingers. “God forgive me! I am a wicked mother,” she sobbed. Lifting her in his arms, Peretz carried her

out into the vestry, where she lost consciousness.

When she again opened her eyes, she looked around in stupid amazement at the strangers, the priests, and the choir-boys.

"What are we doing here, Peretz?" she complained querulously. "Come, let's go home. It seems to me," she whispered in his ear with scorn, "these here are nothing but Goyim [Gentiles]."

Two days later the Gass was in an ecstasy of excitement, when a special coach from Seldau brought Peretz Neuer and the corpse of Schedel, his mother.

On the evening of the next day, when they buried her beside her husband, Peretz disappeared from the village.

For years he was never mentioned in the Gass without a curse. "Matricide" was the favorite name given him, and he was held up as a warning example to all unruly children. As time passed he was

almost forgotten, and it was only his old-time friend Yaikew Holzman, whose business often brought him to Vienna, who kept his memory alive.

Once he came home with the announcement that Peretz, or rather Professor Doctor Franz Josef Neuer, as he was now called, being named after the Emperor, was going to be married to the daughter of Baron von Waldeck-Schleierbach. Another time, that he was acknowledged the finest Greek scholar in all Europe. Then, that his text-books were used in every school in Austria, and that he was making money "like hay."

Later this changed. He then reported that Peretz had two daughters, but did not live happily with his wife. Then they were speaking of a separation. Then he brought the exciting news that the Professor had been wounded in a duel with his brother-in-law, the young Baron, who had called him "a damned Jew." Years

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

after they heard that he was separated from his wife and family, and lived alone in a great, stately mansion, with servants and carriages and all manner of riches.

One day they read in a paper which Yai-kew brought from Vienna that the eminent Greek scholar Dr. Neuer was to spend the coming Easter holidays with his old friend Count Reichenberg at Schloss Maritz. The excitement in the Gass was great.

“So he is coming back!” “To show off his greatness!” “To taunt us with his riches!” “The accursed apostate!” were the comments of the people. And Peretz came.

The Jews listened eagerly for gossip about him, but all they heard was that his handkerchiefs were always spotted with blood, and that he took pellets at night to stop his cough.

“’Tis the wasting disease,” they said; “God’s judgment is upon him.”

A RENEGADE

One morning the children of the Gass came running home with the cry that the Count and his guests were riding through the village on their way to the hunt.

The gay cavalcade, at its head Dr. Neuer, came cantering down the street.

"Seest him, the wretch?" whispered the Jewish women, pointing him out to their children, on whom the moral of a familiar story was lost, for they gazed with delight at the wicked infidel. Indeed, never had a nobler-looking man been seen in the Gass. His hair was gray, his smoothly shaven face lined with care and disease, but he sat, a manly figure of perfect elegance and grace, on a high-stepping, milk-white horse, and the large black eyes glanced with haughty indifference about him.

"He is not even ashamed," cried the people with rage, as the riders disappeared in a cloud of dust.

The great Passover festival had arrived. Through all the village, aye, even at the princely Schloss Maritz, was its wide and subtle influence manifest. Professor Neuer, his heart heavy with memories, feverishly paced a long, dark corridor, when suddenly the clear voice of the young Countess Gisela reached his ear.

"That Jew girl," she cried angrily, "sends me word that, on account of one of their heathenish festivals, she cannot mend my tunic. It is most exasperating! She is the only lace-maker in the village."

"We shall admire the fair penitent in another gown," replied her husband, jestingly.

"You know," pursued the Countess, petulantly, "that I have vowed my Lenten gowns shall be only of black or gray. 'Tis my long tunic of black Duchesse—only a small tear—a few hours' work. The ungrateful creature! I have given her no

end of work, and now, for nothing at all—O, they are all alike, these Jews! I cannot understand papa's infatuation for this Jew—this Dr. Neuer. His haughtiness irritates me. Haughtiness! It is his Jewish impudence."

"I had thought the baptismal waters washed away that taint these twenty years ago," interposed the young Count, laughingly.

"Absurd! As if baptism could wash it away. No. A Jew is a Jew, and remains a Jew. 'Tis in the blood—Judas's blood!"

Dr. Neuer smiled bitterly as he walked on, and the voices died away behind the heavy portières.

But in the Gass, the despised, they of the Judas blood, were seating themselves joyfully at the snowy Seder tables, there to celebrate symbolically and with praise and song the redemption of the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage.

The festival in Yaikew Holzman's house was particularly happy.

Old Holzman read the service, filling in the intervals with merry jokes and reminiscences. The children crammed themselves with sweets, toyed with the sprigs of horse-radish which they were bidden to eat in commemoration of the bitterness of their ancestors' lives in Egypt, and giggled as they slyly threw the bitter herb under the table.

"Granddaddy, dear," said Isserl, Yaikew's youngest, in the middle of the meal, the resting-place in the service, "for whom is that glass of wine there that no one drinks?"

"Listen to our little one," laughed old Holzman, patting the child proudly; "he questions like a Talmud scholar."

"That," he explained, "is for the prophet Elijah. After we have eaten and said grace, we will throw wide open the door, that Elijah may enter. If he

comes, he will be the forerunner of the Messiah; then next year we shall all be in Jerusalem."

"Let me open the door for Elijah," cried Isserl, leaping from his chair after grace had been said.

He flung wide open the door.

"Here he is," he piped gleefully.

The company uttered a cry of terror, for in the door-way stood a man; not the long-haired, barefoot Tishbite, but an elegant gentleman in faultless evening attire. A sable-lined cloak hung upon his shoulders, and around his neck on a ribbon hung an imperial decoration—the Golden Cross of the Legion of Honor.

"Pardon me," said he, entering the room with a timid, hesitating step. "Did I frighten you? Dost thou not know me, Yaikew?"

"Peretz," gasped Yaikew, white to the lips.

"Have you not room for an old friend

at your Seder table?" pleaded Neuer, with a faint smile.

The company stared, with pale, troubled faces, but old Holzman cried scornfully:

"This is a Jewish festival; it is not intended for the Goy. Why do you come and disturb my festival?" he added roughly.

Neuer stood at the door, hat in hand, meek as a beggar. His lips trembled pitifully, his eyes roved large and pleading over the happy family group and the old familiar scene.

"I was—so homesick," he murmured faintly, trembling in every limb.

"Father, let him remain," urged Yai-kew. "Dost thou not see that the man is sick? Surely he is penitent."

"Penitent!" cried the old man, fiercely. "See the sign of his penitence. See! He wears it on his bosom!" and he pointed with trembling finger at the cross on Peretz's breast.

For a moment the bitter smile which the Countess's scorn had called forth hovered again on Peretz's lips. It was quickly replaced by his habitual haughtiness.

"Pardon my intrusion!" he said coldly, but he clutched the door-post and reeled like a drunken man as he walked away and disappeared in the darkness.

An hour later the Gass was disturbed by breathless ejaculations and hurried footsteps on the quiet street.

"What has happened?" cried Yaikew from his door-way.

"A corpse—they have found a corpse in the cemetery," whispered a passer-by.

Yaikew seized a lantern and ran with the rest. The joy of the festival was at an end. The men hurried down the street with pale faces, the terror-stricken women clasped their children, and in every mind raged the horrible memories of the "blood accusation."

All hearts failed when, arrived at the

cemetery, they saw the form of a man stretched lifeless across a grave.

“The Meshummed!” gasped a dozen breaths.

The grave on which he lay was that of his mother. Beside him was an old, black prayer-book, bearing Schedel’s name on the fly-leaf. It lay open at the Kaddish, the mourner’s prayer for the dead, that glorious exaltation of God, that deathless, ancient cry, which, with mysterious power, binds together all Israel as with imperishable bonds of steel.

Peretz the Renegade sleeps in the cemetery of St. Benedict, under a massive marble cross; but every year, at the anniversary of his death, that ancient Kaddish prayer rises to heaven, and a death-light is kindled in his memory, in the house of Yaikew Holzman of the Gass.

II

DOVID AND RESEL

II

DOVID AND RESEL

HOW THEY MARRIED

Ever strange are the instruments of Fate. Passing strange are the instruments of Fate in the Gass, for there it may chance that an awkward bar-maid spills a dish of pickled herring, and lo!—thereupon, and within the hour, a youth and maiden who are unconscious of one another's existence become betrothed.

Thus did it happen, indeed, and Anshel Dorfgeher, instead of blessing gawky Pepi as a bearer of joy, swore as he dodged the acid drippings of her slopping platter, leaped from his chair, and betook himself with his pipe and mug to the other end of the room.

Reb Joiness's tavern was well-filled with

Jewish tradespeople, acquaintances of Anshel, but he chanced to find a vacant place beside a stranger, a prosperous-looking farmer, who after five minutes' conversation turned out to be no other than his old friend, Aarelè Wolf, whom he had not met for thirty years.

"Well, well," cried Anshel, "to think that we two have been here at the fair all week and never met,—and thou wast on the point of returning home, thou sayest. Ai, ai,—and I came near missing thee, too! Nu, how goes it? Thou lookest prosperous.—Pure silver, what?" he said, fingering the buttons on Aarelè's coat.

"Thou dost not look starved thyself," laughed Aarelè, good-humoredly. "How goes it with thee?"

"Nu, there is always something," complained Anshel with a shrug. "'Little children, little troubles; big children, big troubles.' My eldest daughter is already eighteen; but what can I do?—I can't find

her a husband. A world nowadays! Who looks for family or bringing up? Bah! nothing but money, money, and again money. She could have had a certain Krakauer; the family are strangers,—have been only twelve years in Maritz,—but can I give her to the first run-about Polak who asks and who comes from God-alone-knows-where? She could also have had Yosselè Krummer's son—a first-class Shlemiel and an ignoramus; usser does he know the first page of the Pentateuch."

"I know it's not so easy to find a good match nowadays," replied Aarelè. "I've been hunting a wife for my Dovid for half a year."

Anshel started as though he had received a blow in the back.

"Thou sayest not so!" he cried. "Well, well,—so thou hast a grown-up son,—hm, hm,—who would think it?—and art hunting him a wife?—well, well!"

"The Rodower Shadchen [marriage-

broker] runs my house out with offers," said Aarelè, "but what do I want with fine city ladies! Goyim, I give thee my word, —not a Jewish drop left in them."

Anshel's eyes grew small, but they twinkled, as when he held a good hand at cards.

"'Tis as thou sayest," he returned; "these city girls, they are not worth spitting at. Shall I not know, who live among them? But, thank God, my Resel is of a different kind. I don't want to brag, but I tell thee thou couldst travel through the length and breadth of Austria and not find her like. Clever! hm—diligent,—pious,—a beauty!" and then followed a speech, the point of which was that Resel was a wonder; combined the virtues of her ancestresses, Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, with the more modern accomplishment of cooking fish with raisin gravy, and the reason she was still unmarried was because her mate could not be found.

Aarelè looked impressed.

"My Dovidl," he began; but at this point Anshel judged it wise to begin playing trumps. He ordered wine. And it was a good play, for after the third glass Aarelè suddenly said warmly,—

"How would it be if we made a match of them?"

"A yokel!—he's easy," crowed Anshel, inwardly, but his face took on an air of great humility.

"How so,—a match?" he said. "I'm a poor man and thou'lt be wanting a great dowry.

"Nu, how much dost thou give?"

"She has a fine outfit,—a princess need not be ashamed of it," said Anshel.

"Nu?"

"'Tis worth no less than three hundred Gulden," said Anshel.

"Nu, nu?"

"Nu,—two hundred."

"Two hundred!" cried Aarelè. "My

son has but to stretch out his hands, and he can have a girl hanging on each finger,—not with two hundred, but with two thousand! Under three hundred he dare not take her.”

“Did I say I want thy son?” replied Anshel, coolly. “Why should she bury herself in the country, a beautiful, pious maiden?”

This also was a good play, for Aarelè became wroth, and thereby showed his weakness.

“Hast du gesehen!” he cried indignantly,—“too elegant! And I tell thee if she lived a hundred years, she could not find a better match. My Dovid is a boy in a thousand. There is not a second head like his to be found in all of scattered Israel,—of iron, I tell thee,” and so on crescendo, leaving Dovid a marvel of gifts and graces, in no wise out-distanced by Resel.

“Nu,” replied Anshel, “if I haven’t got the money, I haven’t got it, that’s all.”

“The money,” cried Aarelè. “What do I care for the money! That’s the least. But if only for decency,—I can’t let him take a beggar into the house,—make it two-seventy-five.”

“There’s no use talking, Aarelè. When I think of it, I don’t see how I can drive up more than one-seventy-five cash, not if I scrape together my last Kreuzers. Finish thy glass,—I must be going. Why need she marry into the country? If I only mentioned it to her mother,”—and now came Anshel’s best card,—“thou knowest she is the great-grand-niece of a brother of the famous and pious Rabbi Yecheskel Landau,—she would tear her hair out.”

The game was won, for Aarelè could not withstand the bait of such distinguished ancestry.

“Are we not a pair of fools!” he now cried in a conciliatory tone. “Shall we make our children unhappy on account of a few miserable Gulden? Say not another

word;—we'll call it two hundred and done! What? ”

“ Nu,—Maseltow [good luck!]! ”

“ Maseltow! ” and the friends clasped hands across the table.

When Anshel returned from the country-fair next day, bringing with him a prosperous-looking stranger, all the Gass tiptoed with curiosity.

The front door of his house had hardly closed behind them when the back one opened, and forth came little Isserl and Herzl, promising twigs on Anshel's family-tree.

Isserl trotted at break-neck speed in the direction of Muhme Maryam's, and returned with a roundish parcel.

“ Küchel [cookies], ” cried the Gass.

Herzl flew at top-speed in the direction of Shlome Edelstein's, and returned with a longish parcel.

“ Wine, ” gasped the Gass.

Then a rumor went forth, mysterious in its source as the one that scattered Sennacherib, casting consternation into the hearts of the matrons, envy into the hearts of the maidens:

“Hast heard?—Resel, Anshel Dorfger’s, is a bride.”

“No,—thou sayest not so!—With whom?”

“His name is not yet known, but the father-in-law sits in their Stub [best room] eating of Maryam’s most expensive cookies, and drinking red wine out of their silver-plated cup.”

And though the Gass walked past Anshel’s window with studiously averted head or scanning an invisible landscape, it saw aright, for within Aarelè was lolling luxuriously in Anshel’s best arm-chair, while Resel tremblingly poured his wine, and Leah, her mother, sang inward pæans.

The younger branches, from fifteen-year-old Dordl to tiny Lebl, having been

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

duly presented, in a row, like a card of pins in assorted sizes, now held post in the kitchen, Dordl, as eldest, having undisputed right of the key-hole.

"The finest cakes I ever ate," said Aarelè, helping himself to another.

"His fifth!" groaned Dordl at the key-hole.

"The Fresser [glutton]!" wailed the twigs.

"Didst bake them thyself, Resel?" asked the prospective father-in-law, smacking his lips.

"Resel does all of our baking," equivocated her mother with an inward prayer of "God forgive me the lie."

Aarelè laughed at the fib, for his well-trained palate recognized the art of a specialist.

"Nu," he said with a wink, "she may bake this kind once a week, when she's my son's wife."

His wife! Ah, the bewitching word!

DOVID AND RESEL

Resel thrilled at the sound, and soared at its magic on roseate clouds. The silken folds of her wedding-dress rustled divinely in her ears; *he* was leaning fondly over her, as it said in the precious, forbidden books; *he* was whispering tenderly, "Sweet wife." Ah, dearest, sweetest *he*,—for she did not yet know his name.

On the following Friday came Dovid to make the acquaintance of his betrothed, and, before the young couple had had a good look at each other, the Gass already knew that his stiff collars worry him, but beyond that he is cultured, for not only does he carry a white handkerchief, but he uses it.

The Sabbath afternoon is the only time for leisure and love-making in the Gass, and the young people had awaited the hour with anxiety, for much was expected of them at their first private conversation. Dovid had waxed eloquent on grain and

the price of wool at the dinner-table, but to talk to a strange young woman, who happens, moreover, to be one's betrothed, is not such a simple matter as it sounds, and he was nervous. Resel, eager and yet timid, hoped he would do it as it says in the books.

"You young people are perishing, no doubt, to have a word together," said Resel's mother, pushing two chairs together after the dinner-table was cleared, the children disposed of, and Anshel spread in his chair for his weekly nap. "Nu, sit down, sit down,—what are you ashamed of?"

Resel dropped upon the half of one, Dovid slid on to the edge of the other chair, both pink and miserable and sheepish.

Dordl, who had been going about with a glorified "my-turn-next" air, and now held post again at the key-hole, here showed signs of agitation.

"What is it?" whispered the younger twigs.

"Sh-sh—it's lovely!" said Dordl.

"I also was young once," laughed Resel's mother, reminiscently. "Are you not betrothed?—'tis no more than proper; you can even take hands if you wish. Why not?—I'm not even looking."

At this Dovid put out a wooden hand, into which Resel dropped three leaden fingers, and Dordl, at the key-hole, took a panic.

"They're already fond!" she whispered ecstatically.

"How canst tell?"

"They're holding hands!"

And the younger branches pranced on tip-toe, beat their hands in air, and giggled frantically,—

"They're holding hands!"

It was Dovid's business to begin.

Resel twisted her handkerchief and

waited, and Dovid grew warm and thought of many things.

"The point is to begin right," thought he. "To say something that's personal and yet not indelicate, tender and yet not forward, complimentary and yet not flattering,—by Heaven, that's no easy matter!"

Sometimes, when he was ready to begin, Anshel snored, and then it seemed sentimental; then, again, when he had an idea, Resel would sigh, and it seemed coarse. The afternoon was going; Dovid mopped his face and thought that he had never sweated so—not even at haying.

Resel had twisted her handkerchief into a rag, the shadows on the pavement were growing long, when a little child ran by munching a cake, and Dovid had a happy inspiration. Just the thing! Personal, and yet not indelicate; tender, and yet not forward; complimentary, and yet not flattering.

DOVID AND RESEL

He cleared his throat, grew pale, and said in a hollow voice,—

“ My father says thou makest very good Küchel.”

“ Wai!” cried Resel in her heart, “ what sort of creature is this? He thinks of nothing but eating!”

Though Dovid remained all of the next day, came again the following week formally to celebrate the betrothal, and once more to bring his mother, the young couple exchanged not another word in private until the wedding-day.

II

HOW THEY FELL IN LOVE

When Dovid sat down to his breakfast the morning after their wedding, and gazed for the first time coolly and calmly at his wife, he realized suddenly that the pale, young face of the woman opposite him was the face of a stranger, and his spirits sank like lead.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

“As long as life does last,” he moaned. “Suppose she is *not* good,—*not* loving. Do I know? O, father has easy talking. He doesn’t have to live with her. Wai, what have I done? Great God in Heaven, give me strength to bear it!”

Resel sat and sighed. ’Twas all so different from what she had thought. Yes, the wedding had been grand; all the girls had envied her; her silken gown had rustled divinely; but *he*,—he whispered no tender words; he was so cold and silent. Alas, the dream had not come true,—it was a stranger,—not *he* at all.

There was not much to do in their little house, where everything was spotless and new, and the days dragged on wearily. Sometimes she went to the main farmhouse, but all were busy there with their own affairs, and when she took a turn at churning, they laughed at her small, white hands, which blistered in a moment.

Her mother-in-law measured her with

jealous glances, and when Aarelè, the old farmer, caught sight of her, he would cry out teasingly,—

“Nu, Resel, hast not baked those Küchel yet?”

Him she only saw at meal times, and when the silence became too awkward, he talked about the potato crop and the young lambs.

Resel shrugged her shoulders and thought,—

“What do I know about the potato crop and young lambs!”

On a morning in the second week of their marriage came Dovid's mother, who, since his marriage, had been burdened with the idea that her beloved son was about to be annihilated by a process of slow starvation at the hands of this dainty-fingered city lady. She carried a pan of fresh-baked buns.

“Here,” she said with a little sneer, “I've brought you something to eat.

What art going to get for his dinner?" she asked, peering at the stove inquisitively.

"I don't know," said Resel. "I don't know what he likes."

"If the wife don't know, who should?" grumbled the old lady. "If one has a tongue in one's head, one needs but ask. Canst make noodle-soup?" she asked with curling lip.

Resel flushed angrily.

"Am yet as clever as a lot of country yokels," rushed to her lips, but the woman in the door-way stooped under her black shawl, and her face was worn and wrinkled, so Resel bridled her tongue and said meekly,—

"Then I'll make noodles."

"Do they think I'm an idiot?" she scolded over her baking-board. "Pooh, what a great thing to make cheese and mix chicken-food. Any stable wench can milk and churn. I should just like to see one of

them in town. What do *they* know of culture? Can any one of them set a table that the knives and forks stand upright together and the napkins are folded into hats? May I never stir from this spot if *she* can make noodles any finer than these,—fine as hair,” and she looked with satisfaction at a little yellow mound, like a tumbled mass of thread, that was growing under her knife.

The morning dragged on wearily; the dinner was boiling on the stove, and Resel sat at the window and moped, sat facing, not the road by which her husband would come, but northward, toward home and the Gass.

“What sort of life is this?” she mused dejectedly. “Was I raised to such as this,—to sit here alone as in a prison? Who can endure this? At home now, to-day, is market, and the girls are all at the pump, and Reb Noach’s shop is full of new calicoes, and here—my God! what is here?”

An ugly potato-field, a crooked barn, a pasture full of dirty cows," she summed up the landscape. "And *he*—he is so strange and quiet—a lot of stupid farmers. Wai, if mother were only here!" Thus, till a crunching on the walk sent her to her feet and beside the stove.

Then, horrors, what a sight! While she had been sulking, the lid had slipped off the pot and the soup—the soup was gone! Resel smelt its vapors, which were stealing leisurely out of the window. The little that was left looked sad and murky, and the noodles lay, a discolored, sticky, evil-smelling mass, at the bottom of the pot. The soup was burnt,—hopelessly burnt,—and her husband was at the door.

"I'll throw it into the slops,—it won't hurt him to dine on potatoes once in his life," she resolved with a defiant sniff.

Dovid was hot and tired; the kitchen seemed cool and restful, and Resel in her

long apron at the stove was good to look at. He cast about in his mind for something pleasant to say. Noticing the evidence of baking on her board he said:

“Hast made noodles? How didst know I like noodle-soup?”

“God! God!” groaned Resel in her heart, “what shall I do? Did I not always say it—he thinks of nothing but eating?”

There was no help for it—she must serve the soup. He was already at table and waiting.

“He’ll scream,” she thought in agony. “He should just scream. What do I care! He’ll tell his mother. Wai, I’ll never hear the end of it. O, why did I ever leave home?—why did I marry him?—O, my God! my God! I wish I were dead!”

Resel waited until grace was said, then dished out a plateful for Dovid, and took a little for herself.

“Why dost not eat?” asked Dovid, waiting.

“I’m not hungry,” sulked Resel.

Dovid said nothing, but took up his spoon.

Resel’s heart began to beat madly. He dipped. He lifted. He took it in. He swallowed, and then—— He dipped. He lifted. He took it in, and swallowed again and again and yet again without word or sign.

Resel stared with amazement, until the sulking upon her lips began to melt, and fell as hot tears upon her folded hands in her lap.

Dovid saw them fall, and his heart ached within him.

“Poor little pigeon, she’s troubled about the soup,” he thought, and choked over his food.

“Art not well, Resel?” said he, when he had finished, and Resel still sat motionless and tearful.

“I’m well,” faltered Resel.

“Shall I send mother or one of the chil-

dren to stay with thee?" he asked at the door.

Resel shook her head mutely, but as the door closed behind him she flung herself forward on the table, sobbing.

"He *ate* it—the nasty, sticky, smelly mess! Not to grieve me, he ate it. Poor, poor fellow,—works all day there in the hot sun for me, and *I*—I give him burnt soup. I am not fit to be his wife,—he should have sent me packing, that's what! Not a complaint! not a word! Fie on thee, thou lazy slut. If mother knew it, would she not box my ears, and serve me right?" Thus, full of self-reproach and penitence until the winter in her heart was melted all away, and in its place bloomed a new and joyous springtime. "But he shall have a supper better even than his mother can make," she resolved, drying her eyes. "If he would only forgive me that soup. He has a kind heart, my husband. Another would have scolded and stormed.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

How sweetly he said it, 'Art not well, Resel?' "

Resel smiled and looked about her. It was as if her tears had washed away a mist from before her eyes, and she saw her new home now for the first time.

"It is a pretty place," she thought, "if one but looks at it right. 'Twas sweeter than a song—'Art not well, Resel?' I think he said 'my dear.' Has the Gass the like of this?" she boasted while getting her dishwater. "There one has to run half a mile to the pump for a drop of water, but we—we have a well-full right before the door! Pooh, what are Reb Noach's calicoes to this? We have fields and chickens, such a dear potato-field, such a sweet barn, such darling cows! Yes, I'm sure he said 'my dear'!"

A meadow-lark on a fence-post cocked its head and trilled a merry roulade. Resel listened and laughed, she knew not why, and, as if not to be outdone, she lifted her

round chin and chirped a lively synagogue tune. She entered the house with her brimming pail. There in the corner hung his house-coat, old, gray, and shabby, and sagging at the pocket where bulged his tobacco-pouch. Resel began to tremble deliciously at sight of it, the hot blood poured over neck and face, and with a little cry she ran and hid her burning face in its rough folds.

“Oh, my dear, darling Dovid,” she cried, “’twas no mistake. ’Tis *he*—’tis *he*.”

David had left the house with the purpose of joining the potato-diggers, but sat instead on a barrow chewing straws.

“How she wept,—poor little crumb,” he mused. “Am I such a brute, that she cries for fear of me? No wonder; I go around in the house like a growling bear and say nothing. She burnt the soup;—nu, what of it? can happen to anyone; such a young

little thing! Don't I remember the time mother salted the potatoes till they were like brine, and spilled the buttermilk, and we had no supper at all? Perhaps,—it can't be that she was sorry?" and Dovid's eyes grew filmy with gazing at the little brown house that was now his home. "Perhaps she's homesick; perhaps—my God! perhaps she's not well," and with a new agony and a wild gripping at the heart he leapt to his feet and started across the field homeward. Just then Resel appeared in the window shaking a table-cloth, and Dovid had to lean with a sense of sudden weakness.

Long before the supper hour he went hurrying homeward, while Resel sat, pink, neat, and tremulous, at the window; sat looking down the road by which Dovid was coming, and—alas, for woman's constancy—with her back turned on Maritz and the Gass, on the town-pump and Reb Noach's calicoes. She saw him coming and hurried

to the stove, where the dumplings were browning prettily. His step was on the walk; Resel turned and saw him standing in the door-way, self-conscious and awkward as a school-boy on exhibition day. In his hand he held a large bunch of purple flowers, and his face was as red as these.

"Asters," he said clumsily.

Resel took the flowers, and turned pale with the sudden determination to get that soup off her mind at once.

Dovid washed his face and hands and turned to take his house-coat. Ah, that coat! Resel's courage rose.

"The soup," she blurted out, and there were tears in her voice.

David turned in alarm.

"'Twas fine!" he cried.

"'Twas burnt," said Resel.

"O, the least bit scorched," said Dovid.

"Scorched! 'twas burnt to a cinder!" cried Resel.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

“I—I like soup when it’s burnt,” said Dovid.

“O-o-o-o-oh, thou dear, darling liar!” and Resel flung herself, laughing and sobbing, on her husband’s neck.

Dovid strained her close to his heart. Then he lifted her moist, glowing face, and for the first time kissed his wife upon the lips.

III

LOEBELE SHLEMIEL

III

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

The trouble in telling the story of a Shlemiel lies right in the beginning, for immediately one asks: "What is a Shlemiel?" That's the difficulty. What is a Shlemiel?

Now Shlemiel can be neither translated nor defined, and, pray, be it known right here: the classic Shlemiel of story—one Peter by name—was no Shlemiel at all. He was rich, and as the saying goes: "Riches make clever and handsome." A rich man may at the worst be shlemielig, but a Shlemiel—never!

It has been said that a Shlemiel is one who is bound to have bad luck, but if you will stop and analyze them, you will find that his mishaps are not a matter of luck at all. No, they are due solely to—well, to his own Shlemieligness.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

It has also been said that a Shlemiel is one whose bread always falls on the buttered side (which really amounts to the same thing), but this will not do at all, for the simple reason that a real Shlemiel rarely has any butter to his bread.

Perhaps the best way to learn what a Shlemiel is would be to ask the people of the Gass, the home of the true Shlemielim. Well, let us ask.

“Wie haisst,—what is a Shlemiel?” comes the incredulous reply. “Who is a Shlemiel, you wish to ask. Loebelè, he is a Shlemiel that God have mercy!”

And Loebelè was a Shlemiel; of a peculiar kind, too. His greatest misfortunes were due mainly to his being always too early; this in spite of the maxim in many tongues to the effect that the early bird gets the worm.

Only once was Loebelè too late, and then it cost him his life.

He began it by coming into the world

full two months before his time, which cost his mother her life, and left him a charity child upon the community. Along with two other orphans, he was given over to the charge of Muhm [Aunt] Shmunè, a pious and melancholy widow, who taught them, when they reached the years of discretion,—say four or thereabouts,—many serious things. Foremost among them this: that nothing is so bitter as the bread of charity, and nothing so sweet as the bread of one's own labor.

Loebelè pondered this matter gravely, and dreamed of the day when he should taste the sweetness of the bread of his own labor, but his two companions ate the bread of charity with relish, and kicked their heels in reckless glee when perchance there was a scrape of butter on it.

Loebelè was nine years old when he took his first step toward independence.

One day he came home from school in great excitement and announced: "Muhm

Shmunè, thou needst buy but a middling-sized loaf hereafter."

"Wie haisst?" said Muhm Shmunè.

"I have work," said Loebelè, and waved his hand as one would say, "Behold, a millionaire!"

"Reb Chaim Melamed [the teacher] has got the rheumatism," he went on, "and when he is through giving us all our licks, his arms are so weak that he cannot move the benches. I am going to move them for him."

In explanation be it said, that these benches were the great, heavy ones upon which the pupils "learned" all day long, but which it was necessary to pile up on one side of the room every evening, since the floor-space they occupied was required for sleeping and household purposes by Reb Chaim and his family.

"Nu, 'tis time," said Muhm Shmunè. "When I was thy age I earned not only my own clothes but also my grandmother's

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

by knitting. And what dost get?" she asked.

"My breakfast. Every day a thick slice of bread, on Tuesdays and Thursdays flour-soup, and on Sunday a piece of Barches [Sabbath bread], if may-be there is any left over," said Loebelè.

Loebelè soon became so eager in this service and for the sweet bread that rewarded it, that he was wont to come too early in the morning to replace the benches, long before Reb Chaim was up, in fact. And one stormy winter day, he sat so long on the door-step waiting for the Melamed to arise, that he was taken with a serious illness, which left him with a narrow chest and a bad cough for the rest of his life.

Loebelè did very well at his books, but when he reached man's estate,—in other words, when he was thirteen,—he had to begin to earn his own living. This was no simple matter, for he had no head for

business, and when they apprenticed him to the tailor and to the cobbler, his masters drove him away.

"A Shlemiel," they said, "he is not worth his salt."

Not that Loebelè was not faithful and eager, but his fingers were all thumbs, as the saying goes. No one would have him.

He remained longest with Moshè Saddler, for Moshè was a patient man, and in a few years' time Loebelè could splice a broken rein or put a patch on an old saddle as deftly and neatly as anyone.

Then a great misfortune befell.

Herr Christian Vanek's daughter had married a saddler who came to follow his calling in the village. There, to his amazement and indignation, he found a Jew plying the same craft. Holy Mother Mary! the impudence of the hound!

In the province from which the young bridegroom had come, no Jew was permitted to work in new leather. Surely, his

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

Fatherland would not tolerate such an abomination. There was no doubt but that Moshè Saddler was a law-breaker. The young man appealed to the courts. They promised to investigate; and although Moshè, and his father before him, had made saddles in the village for thirty years or more, this business was now forbidden him, until such time as the courts should decide whether it was lawful or not.

So Moshè was reduced to working only in old leather, mending harnesses and whips. There was not work enough for himself, let alone a helper, and Loebelè was in sorry straits.

Then Reb Chaim, the teacher, who remained Loebelè's life-long friend, had an idea.

"Thou art now a man, Loeb," he said one day. "Why dost not get married?"

"Married?" said Loebelè, with a modest shrug. "Who would take me for a son-in-law?"

“Pah!” cried Reb Chaim. “Shtuss! Thou art a whole man. I know a maiden for thee. She is the daughter of my cousin, Yitzchok Bauer. A fine girl, and she has a dowry of three hundred Gulden. With the money thou canst buy a little business, and sit in a store the rest of thy days, and live like the pious in Gan Eden [Paradise].”

Loebelè rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

“I have heard of the maiden,” he said, “she is not so young.”

“But what a housekeeper! A pearl, I tell thee!” said Reb Chaim.

“Also, she is cross-eyed,” said Loebelè.

“The le-e-ast bit cross-eyed; otherwise, a lily!”

“’Tis said of her she has a bitter tongue,” said Loebelè.

“Nu, and if!” cried Reb Chaim, angrily. “If she were a first-class match, would she wait for such a Shlemiel as thou?”

Loebelè was not insulted.

“What’s true is true,” he mused.

He visited Yitzchok Bauer. The match was soon made. On the whole, he felt flattered that a solid Balbos [householder] should accept him as a son-in-law; and Sorel, the maiden, was very willing.

Then, on a pleasant day in autumn, Loebelè started off for the farm, where dwelt that solid Balbos, Yitzchok Bauer, and Sorel his daughter, for the next day was the wedding. When he arrived, his betrothed greeted him with a surprised, "Nu?"

"Sorel, my life," said Loebelè, "to-morrow!—Is it not our wedding day?"

Sorel clasped her hands in utter disgust.

"Shlemiel" she cried. "Not to-morrow—next Tuesday."

Loebelè was abashed. He had come a week too soon. Yitzchok Bauer tore his hair at the thought of his future son-in-law.

"Not one Behemah [animal]," he

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

growled to himself, "nay, he is a whole menagerie."

Loebelè offered to go home and return again in a week, but Yitzchok Bauer suddenly became afraid.

"The Lord only knows what new Shlemieligness he will commit between now and then," he thought; "perhaps, God forbid, he will not turn up at all."

It had been a long hunt to find Sorel a husband and—"This Tuesday is as good as next," said Yitzchok. "Why need you wait? Sorel will bake a Barches, and I'll go for the rabbi."

So they were married next day.

Two days later Yitzchok Bauer's barns burned down, and with them went his stock and his whole harvest. He was a ruined man. He could not pay his lease money, much less a dowry; so Loebelè had an old, cross-eyed, ill-tempered wife, and was poorer than ever.

Moreover the people laughed at him.

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

“A Shlemiel!” they said, “why is he always in such a hurry?”

But Loebelè let them laugh. He carried his round shoulders straighter than ever before. Was he not himself now a Balbos? As to Sorel, “Though without a dower, though a little old and a little sour and a little cross-eyed, she is like unto her of whom it is written, ‘Her candle goeth not out by night,’” he mused. Nor had he any fear for the future, for Loebelè’s strength was his faith.

“‘Though I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh on me,’ as it is written,” he said, and was a happy man.

Time went by. The little ones came thick and fast. Loebelè worked faithfully at everything he could find to do, yet he could not earn enough to feed their ever hungry mouths.

One bitter winter Loebelè’s distress became so keen that the Gass felt it time to interfere.

“Shema, the misery of it! One cannot sleep at night for hearing his little ones wail with hunger,” said the neighbors.

There were those who said that Loebelè burned twigs in his stove, that the people, seeing the smoke arise, might think they were cooking dinner. Something must be done, the Gass decided—but what? Loebelè would not borrow, and when they left a loaf or a pot of meal on his door-step, he would carry it to the poor-authorities, saying gravely; “Someone must have lost it. If the owner cannot be found, let it be given to the poor.”

It was Anshel the peddler who finally had an idea.

“People,” he said one day, “I have it! We will make Loebelè’s fortune, please God, and yet not hurt his pride. There is to be a sale of old Government leather at the garrison next week. I have looked it over, a nice lot of leather;—and I know the quartermaster;—a golden quartermaster;

—for one hundred Gulden cash he will let me have it. What think you, can we get together one hundred Gulden?”

“Why can we not?” said the men.

“Good! We will buy the leather, and give it to Loebelè—as a loan, of course. He can pay it back as he pleases. There is enough leather there to make harnesses for a whole province. If he handles it right, his fortune is made.”

Reb Chaim, as Loebelè's closest friend, was delegated to make him the offer, and Loebelè accepted with tears of gratitude. And that he might be put at once in the way of earning something, they planned to make purchases as soon as he should be in possession of the leather.

“I know two farmers who will buy old saddles,” said Anshel.

“I shall order a harness,” said Yermah, the teamster.

“I can use some of the leather in my shop,” said Mendel, the cobbler.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

“I also,” said Shmul, the book-binder.

The Gass rejoiced, for at last Loebelè was in a fair way to become prosperous and everyone was happy;—that is, everyone save Loebelè. From the day that he had taken the one hundred Gulden debt upon himself, peace had fled him.

“Was iss der Mähr?” said the people. “He goes about with a face like seven days’ rainy weather.”

Loebelè could not eat, and he could not sleep. Like a huge mountain the weight of the debt lay upon him, and threatened to crush him.

“Woe is me!—one hundred Gulden!” he moaned. “And what if I cannot sell the leather? And if perchance I fall sick and die,—to leave my poor family with such a debt. Woe is me!”

Early in the morning, before yet the leather had been delivered to Loebelè, Reb Chaim found him standing outside his

door, clutching something tightly in his hand.

“I’ve got it,” said Loebelè, delightedly.

“What?”

“The money.”

“The money?” gasped Reb Chaim.

“I have made a good business, thank God,” said Loebelè. “I have sold the leather;—here is the money, and I have a nice little profit beside.”

“Thou hast sold it?” cried Reb Chaim.

“For one hundred and six Gulden,” said Loebelè, proudly.

“Chammer [ass]!” shrieked Reb Chaim. “It was worth three times the money.”

Loebelè threw out his hands in protest.

“Reb Chaim,” he said, “would you have me be a usurer? Six per cent is all that is allowed. I have often heard our old Rav—peace be to him—say it;—more than six per cent is usury.”

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

The Gass was disgusted and enraged beside.

“The Shlemiel!” they said. “Now we are done with him.”

But Loebelè was at peace with himself in the thought of having done righteously. Three times every day he went to the synagogue, and when he sang, “The righteous shall inherit the land,” his heart grew light. In his mind’s eye he already saw himself owner of a little shop and earning three Gulden a week; which was Loebelè’s interpretation of the text. But he was a long time coming into his inheritance, even into the smallest part thereof. In fact, things grew even worse.

There was no errand so wearisome that he would not undertake it; there was no load so heavy that he would not carry it. He hurried about with frantic eagerness from morning until night, yet hunger always kept many paces ahead. But Loebelè’s faith did not waver.

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

“The Lord will help, in His own good time,” he said.

Thus another year went by, and then came the day of his reward.

One hot summer afternoon, as Loebelè was tramping the streets in search of work, he came upon a stranger who asked to be directed to the rabbi, since he was ill and in need of help. Loebelè took him to the Schlafstatt [the shelter for poor travellers], and there they made him comfortable. The stranger then laid bare to Loebelè all his distress. He was on his way to the Great Annual Fair in Rodow, whither he was going on business. He had come a great distance, but now, alas, he was sick. He had not enough money to take him back home. If he could but sell his wares, he would return home, and all would be well. And what had he to sell? See!—and he opened a large paste-board box and disclosed to Loebelè’s delighted gaze two hundred or more toy watches.

“Behold!” said the stranger. “At ten paces one would swear they are of real silver. With this little key one can effect that these little hands leap about the face—quite like a real watch, thus;—and do but hear how delightfully it screeches thereto.”

Loebelè was entranced. Never had he seen anything so charming.

“How much do you get for them?” he asked.

“One asks twenty-five Kreuzers;—one takes what one can get,” said the stranger. “Their real value I do not know. They fell to my father-in-law with a mortgage. I would sell them gladly, the whole job lot, for ten Gulden;—moreover, he who would buy them would be doing a great Mitzwah [pious deed], for then I could return home to my family.”

Loebelè fairly thrilled with the great idea that possessed him. Why should not he borrow ten Gulden,—it would be but for a few days,—buy the toy watches, and sell

them at the Fair? At ten Kreuzers a piece it would be a fine business. At twenty-five, —and Loebelè's thoughts fairly reeled at the grandeur of the prospect. Moreover he need have no scruples about per cents.

“One takes what one can get;—the real value is not known.” As to the stranger, he himself said it would be a Mitzwah to relieve him of them.

Loebelè hurried to Reb Chaim to unfold his plan and borrow ten Gulden. Then he bought the watches, and hurried home in high spirits.

“When I return,” said he to his wife, “I shall buy thee a new cooking-pot that thou mayest at last be done with thy complaining.”

“And thou, Mirl,” he said to his daughter, “thee I shall buy flannel for a petticoat. And thee, Yossel, I shall buy a pair of shoes,—the best second-hand shoes in the market,—that thou mayest go to school even in the coldest weather. And

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

we shall have baked potatoes every night for supper—”

“With butter?” gasped little Hirshelè, who was a fanciful child.

“Ha,” laughed Loebelè, “hear the little impudence! He has not yet the potatoes, and wishes already butter thereto.”

It was yet three days until the opening of the Fair, but Loebelè started off early next morning, for he was going to walk, and moreover he was always on time.

The sun was hot, and the roads lay deep in dust, but he trudged on in great content.

“The Lord helps,—I have always said it,—a little patience only,” he mused.

Pictures of the future loomed bright before him, and the fairest one was his son Yossel with shoes on, that he might go to school even in the coldest weather, and become some day—who knows?—chief-rabbi of Prague.

It was the day of the opening of the Fair when Loebelè with a great crowd of people

arrived at its gates. He was crowding in with the rest, when he felt himself thrust violently in the side. It was the butt end of a gendarme's gun, and the gendarme himself was crying roughly, "Can't he read?" and pointing to a placard. There, at the foot of a list of admonitions to the public, Loebelè read in large letters:

DOGS AND JEWS ARE NOT ALLOWED WITHIN.

Loebelè stared open-mouthed. For a moment he thought he should fall. He stepped aside and sat down by the roadside. What had happened? His mind was dazed with the suddenness of the shock. He could not go within; he dared not peddle without; he could not sell his watches. He gazed at the throngs of people passing in at the gates, all laughing, joking, happy. None worried them; none hindered them; and slowly the misery of his plight dawned upon him. They worked and earned unhindered. He was barred out like a dog.

Their children need not go hungry and barefoot. He also had little ones, and they were waiting for him and watching,—but he would bring no petticoat for Mirl; no shoes for Yossel;—and Hirshelè, hungry little Hirshelè, no potatoes with butter for him,—nay, nothing, not even dry bread.

“Why is it thus, O Lord?” he moaned. Had he not ever striven to do righteously? Had he ever wittingly wronged God or man? His heart was full of bitterness, and for the first time in his life his faith, even Loebelè Shlemiel’s faith, grew weak.

“Perchance the Lord has forgotten me,” he mourned. “Perchance He has grown tired of helping me. Can one blame Him? Such a Shlemiel! For thirty years we Jews have been doing business at the Fair, and when I come—it is forbidden!”

And then he laid his tired head upon his knees, and bitter tears ran down his cheeks and into his grizzled beard.

It was evening when he roused himself

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL


and began his homeward journey. He had eaten nothing that day. There was nothing left of the bread and cheese which he had brought from home, and he had not a single Kreuzer; but this did not alarm him. He was used to fasting, and he would probably get along very well until he reached home.

He did not go far that evening, for he was weary and sore and heartsick, so he lay down in a hedge to sleep. When he awoke it was morning, and the hot sun was beating fiercely down upon him. Loebelè said his prayers, drank at a brook, and started again on his journey, but the constant walking and the nights in the open air had greatly sharpened his appetite. He could not conceal from himself that he was very hungry. He had no money, and if he had had any it would have availed him nothing. The town lay several miles behind him. He knew of no Jewish house in that neighborhood, and food from a Gentile was forbid-

den. It occurred to him presently that perhaps he could exchange one of his toy watches for a couple of eggs, which he dared eat.

At the first farm where he asked, they laughed and told him they had no use for toy watches. At the next the woman said she had no eggs, but when she saw how pallid and weary he looked, she brought him a piece of bread. Loebelè devoured the bread with his hungry eyes, but he shook his head;—he dared not eat it. Who knows but that it was made with pig's fat? It was Trefa [forbidden]. He thanked the woman and went on. At the next farm a man cursed him, and said that no doubt he had stolen the watches. Loebelè hurried on frightened and abashed. He had no spirit left to try again.

Night was again approaching. Another day gone, and he had not yet broken his fast. His thoughts went back constantly to the piece of bread he had refused in the



LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

morning. He remembered that once a poor peddler had come to the rabbi in great distress, and told him that some soldiers had made him eat pork at the point of the sword. The peddler was in great distress of soul, but the rabbi said that this sin would not be counted against him, since it is written that when in danger of death, it is permitted even to eat Trefa.

Loebelè quite made up his mind to go back and ask for that piece of bread. Was not he also in danger of death? Then he smiled to himself more confidently. Nay, one does not die so easily. It is said of one of the pious of olden times, that he ate but two dates and one olive daily, and he, Loebelè, had eaten bread but two days ago. No, he would wait until morning; perchance something would turn up, and again he slept in the open.

When he arose next day to resume his journey, he found his legs grown so heavy that he could hardly drag them. His head



A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

throbbed madly; and when he walked, all the world seemed to reel. There was no house in sight, but not far down the road was the beginning of a forest. Loebelè thought he might find berries there, and he dragged himself to it; but the forest ground was bare as an empty threshing floor. The coolness of it was pleasant however, and he rested there awhile. When he arose to go, he could not remember which way he had come. No opening was visible anywhere. He wandered about hither and thither. Often he stopped to rest. As soon as he was seated, he slept and dreamed of mountains of bread and rivers of clear, cool water.

“This will never do,” he thought, rousing himself. “I must get home and to work—else how pay that debt?”

He took up his box and walked furiously,—for miles and miles it seemed. Then it occurred to him that perhaps he was dreaming, and he opened his eyes to find

LOEBELÈ SHLEMIEL

that he had been standing quite still, and was leaning heavily against a tree.

..... It was late in an afternoon, but he knew not of what day, when he at last saw a clearing, and found himself on the road. But all was strange to him. It was not the road by which he had come. About a quarter of a mile away was a farm-house. Loebelè determined to go there and beg for food.

“ ‘When in danger of death,’ as it is written. I can no longer, O Lord,” he cried in his heart; “it is time now,—it is time.”

As he reached the gate of the house his foot struck a root. He staggered and fell—and suddenly a great peace came upon him;—hunger and thirst and weariness, all were fled.

“It is pleasant here,” thought Loebelè, “I think I’ll sleep a little.”.....

It was Yitzchok Bauer’s gate at which

he had fallen down, and in the morning they found him.

“A Shlemiel, nebbich [poor fellow],” said the people, “to die of starvation at his own father-in-law’s door-step.”

“He was gone only six hours when the notice came that we Jews would no longer be allowed to do business at the Fair. Such a Shlemiel, nebbich—always too early!”

“Nay, this time for once he was too late,” said Reb Chaim: “For thirty years we Jews have been doing business there, and when Loebelè came, it was forbidden. A Shlemiel, nebbich!”

But it was foolish to pity him, for Loebelè was at rest. The Lord had not forgotten him. The Lord had looked down, and had had compassion on him. Yes, he had his reward. His troubles now were over. Loebelè slept.

IV

A SINNER IN ISRAEL



IV

A SINNER IN ISRAEL

There are various ways of gaining prominence in the Gass, and a good way is to die. If you cannot be a dead man, be a sick one; failing in that, be his nurse.

Now prominence had come unto the house of Hendel the feather-woman in two of these excellent forms. Shayè Soldat, her lodger, was a sick man, and Hendel herself was his nurse. And Hendel had the better of it, too, for when one is sick, one must lie abed, and the doctor forbids all visitors, as is the new-fangled notion, though it is well known that not only is it a pious deed, but a religious duty, to visit the sick. So Shayè was alone,—and where, pray, is the joy of fame if one may not strut?—but Hendel walked abroad, and,

when she did so, all the Gass rushed forth to greet her.

“Good morning, Hendel. Nu, what does the Doctor say?”

“How’s business, Hendel? What thinkest thou, will he live?”

Hendel’s chin sought the air. Not that she was proud. Nay, God forbid! None can say that Hendel Federschleisserin, who lived by stripping feathers for the beds of the rich, was proud, but she was human. Ordinarily of no more consequence in Maritz than a stray kitten, on this particular Sunday morning her progress to the butcher shop was as marked by polite attentions as if she had been the Rav [rabbi] himself.

“See how grossartig!”

“Has Hendel won the grand prize?”

“Why dost not answer when one speaks?”

“Esoi,” said Hendel, languidly, and shook them off like flies—all save one small

boy named Shimmelè, who glued himself fast to her heels, for Shimmelè was his grandmother's news-bearer,—and a soldier, a sick one, was a tasty bit, not to be dropped so lightly.

Hendel entered Machel Katzev's shop, Shimmelè close behind.

"A nice marrow-bone," said Hendel.

"For soup?" growled Machel.

"Nay, broth."

Now, Machel was a man not to be treated with scorn, one with a habit of dropping absently bits of liver and nibs of sausage into poor women's baskets. So when he asked,—

"Nu, how is he?" Hendel replied politely by rolling her eyes toward the rafters, throwing out her hands, and groaning dismally, whereat Machel said "Ai, wai!—hm—hm!" and Shimmelè rushed home to tell his granny the worst.

And Shimmelè's report was a true one. Shayè Soldat—sometime soldier, all-time

sinner, fourteen years' service, two campaigns, a leather medal, and a wooden leg—lay a-dying. This Hendel fully corroborated as, on her homeward way, she stopped in Mendel the cobbler's shop. And the Gass saw the justice of Hendel's preference in the matter.

"Mendel has a right to know," said they, for though the sick man owed Hendel five Gulden twenty for lodging, he owed Mendel two Gulden fifty for Sabbath dinners, and Mendel was thus counted next of kin.

"Up to here the water is already," Hendel was saying, indicating her own thick waist. "When it will have reached the heart, then is the end. Eisak Schulklopfer sits with him—one leg he has out of the door ready to run for the Chevra [Holy Brotherhood, a society which attends the dying] at any moment. The Kelef [hound]! 'Tis out of pure wickedness he is dying. Not one Kreuzer has he paid me in half a year. Does he think I find money on the street?

A disease in his bones, the Ganef [rascal]!" with which pious though superfluous wish she betook herself homeward, there to convert her nice marrow-bone into broth for her sick lodger, who, though a great sinner, was, after all, a "Jewish child," whom one cannot allow to go to destruction.

At the angle of the street, where the Gass tries for a moment to close upon itself like a jack-knife, she was run into by a hurricane, of which, as it whirled around the corner, she recognized Eisak Schulklopper's brown coat-tails and green pantofles.

Hendel stood still and held her breath, and in a moment they were upon her,—Reb Noach Fingerhut and Loser Pereles, Reb Shlomè Wineseller and Loebelè Shlemiel,—all pacing down the street as though it were a footrace, the goal a certain cleft in a wall, down which they briskly dodged.

"The Chevra!" gasped Hendel at sight of this, for the cleft in the wall led to one

place only, and that was Hendel's house. Then she made after them at the top of her speed.

When she reached home, the Holy Brotherhood was already busied with preparations for the prayers for the dying, though Shlomè Wineseller, a death-bed expert, grumbled skeptically as he lit a candle, "He groans me too strong for a dying man."

The sick man, indeed, lay uttering pitiful groans, while streams of tears ran down his cheeks. At sight of Hendel he brightened, and began to mutter something. Hendel hurried to his side.

"Why dost thou weep, Shayè Leben?" she soothed. "Wouldst not like a bit of something to eat?"

The sick man nodded vigorously.

"A spoonful of gruel! No? I have a beautiful bone for broth. Not that, either? What then?"

Shayè spoke, but so feebly that Hendel

had to bend low to hear. Then suddenly she started up, her eyes glaring wildly, and began to back nervously toward the door.

“What is the matter?” cried the Chevra.

“Shema!—Wai geschrieen!—Help, people!” was all that Hendel could gasp.

Reb Noach, as president of the Holy Brotherhood, felt it his duty to investigate. He hurried to the bedside.

“What is it, Shayè Soldat?” he asked.

Again the sick man spoke, and Reb Noach bent over him to hear.

Now it is known of Reb Noach that he weighs two hundred odd pounds, also that he has a club-foot, yet all the Chevra is witness that at this moment he leapt nimbly as any ballet girl clear across the room to the door, out of which he dashed as briskly as a young goat. The Holy Brotherhood followed at his heels.

“What has happened? What is the matter?”

“Meshuggè [crazy]!” gasped Reb Noach, striking his forehead—“stark, staring mad! He desires to eat—hear, Jewish children!—what do you think he desires to eat?”

“What?”

“A piece of salt pork!”

The panic flashed to the four winds of heaven. In a moment the horrible rumor was through the Gass.

“God have mercy! Thus dies a sinner. Have you not heard? Wholly, entirely meshuggè. He lies on his bed and is shrieking that he desires to eat a pig!”

What was to be done? In such an extremity there is but one can help, and that is the doctor. And Doctor Pinkus was just the man—though small of body yet intrepid of soul—as witness: not only did he walk boldly into the madman’s room, but, having held his pulse and felt his legs, he said as calmly as one would say “Gut Shabbes,” “Let him have his bit of salt

pork,"—for Shayè still lay wailing and moaning: "A bit—a morsel—just a taste of salt pork."

The Holy Brotherhood was petrified with horror.

"What! Aid and abet him in his sin?"

"You see he is not responsible," said the Doctor.

"So much the worse—the sin would then be on us."

"Let that be my care. The sin I take upon myself," said the Doctor.

"He would never forgive us if he knew."

The Doctor only laughed. "He has been such a big Trefa-Fresser [eater of the unclean] all his life that the Lord will not even notice this little bit in the pile."

"Never!" cried the Chevra: "No!" and "Never!"

"Then good-by—and to-morrow you can bury him. He cannot last long if he keeps up this racket. Give him but a little peace, and he may yet pull through. So

long as there is life there is hope," said the Doctor, for of such is the wisdom of men of science.

So the voice of authority prevailed. It was decided to let the madman have his desire. On Eisak Schulklopper—unwilling agent for all the disagreeable errands of the Gass—was put the awful task, and amidst groans and tears he repaired to the Christian inn, there to procure the disgusting morsel, while the Gass waited with bated breath for the earth to open and swallow them.

"He is bringing *It*," went the rumor.

"In Hendel's broken Sabbath pot."

"The milchig one?"

"Yes."

"Woe is me!"

"He has taken *It* into the house."

"The Doctor has handed *It* to Shayè."

"He has eaten of *It*."

"Shema!—and is dead?"

"Usser," reported Eisak, "not he—on

the contrary, he is sleeping, and very well, too. Let him who doubts it listen at the door, and he will hear him snoring."

This, in fact, was the truth of the matter. Shayè, having eaten of the salt pork, became filled with a great calm, and, curling himself up in his bed, went peacefully to sleep. And not only did he survive, but he grew rapidly better, until in a month's time he was fully recovered, and was loafing again in his favorite spot—the bench in front of Mendel Schuster's shop.

But Shayè was now a man to blink at—one of whom the Gass said in horror, "May God defend everyone from the Makkes [beating] which will be his portion in the Hereafter."

"Trefa-Fresser!" they called him.

"Poshè Yisroel [sinner in Israel]!" said the pious, and spat at the mention of his name. But the sage ones merely shrugged their shoulders, and said, "A meshuggener Yüd [crazy Jew]."

For weeks Shayè's strange fit of madness remained a favorite topic and a tantalizing mystery, yet was there not an intrepid soul that dared broach the subject to him. Indeed, there was a strong prohibition against it, and even the school-boys were admonished not to linger about him listening to his war yarns, as had been their pleasure, lest at any moment the madness might, God forbid! break out again.

Now, there was an inquiring spirit in the Gass, lodged in the small person of one named Shimmelè, aged six, known also as the Bochurlè [little scholar], and it was this inquisitive spirit which at last pried open the seal of that fast-bound mystery. Not that Shimmelè meant wilfully to disobey. No, he was a pearl of a child (let him who doubts it ask his granny), but when on that sunny day he lingered—not to speak to Shayè—nay, God forbid! only to have one good look at him—Bang! before he

could clap his hand over his mouth, a question had popped out.

“Did it hurt?” was what Shimmelè asked.

Shayè smiled, for an attention to his wooden leg was a tacit compliment to Shayè himself, so he replied politely by heaving his shoulders, throwing out his hands, and making a frightful face to indicate the extent of the hurt.

“And yet brokest no bones!” cried Shimmelè, admiringly.

“Did I not!” said Shayè as he patted his stump; “’twas shivered into bits like so much glass.” Then, scenting an audience for his favorite one, which began, “In the year ’31, when we were campaigning under my General Boom,” he took his pipe from his mouth, cleared his throat, and began,—

“In the year ’31——”

“Yes, I know,” interrupted Shimmelè, “it was then so cold that you soldiers had to walk one close behind the other, to pull

one another's legs out, as at every step they froze fast in the snow. That's not what I mean."

Shayè grunted his disgust, and resumed his pipe.

"When I stand by the pump I can spit way across the cobbles, Maierlè can spit to the walk, and Yainkelè, though he is a big blockhead, can spit clean into the door of the Cheder [school]," said Shimmelè then.

Shayè received this information with contemptuous silence, but Shimmelè continued to stare wistfully. Then he heaved a sigh, and said musingly,—

"It must have been a strong spit."

Shayè puffed in silence.

"How far didst thou fly, Shayè?" burst from Shimmelè next.

"Fly?" roared Shayè. "Dost think because I have but one leg that I am a stork? Thou hadst better go home and lick out granny's sugar-pots instead of talking im-

puudence to thy elders, thou Omhoretz [ignoramus] !”

Shimmelè was stung in his tenderest spot! An ignoramus, he! Was not his “iron head” the pride of the Gass!

“Am no Omhoretz,” he said with dignity, “and where is the impudence, if I but ask thee a polite question?”

Shayè was perplexed.

“What question?” he growled.

“’Tis said of thee that the reason why thou didst not die in thy great sickness is because thou couldst not, for even Gehinnom [hell] spat thee out, and I did but wish to know, when thou wast spat out how far thou flewest, and whether it hurt, and where——” but there he stopped, for a huge hand was making straight for his ear. Shimmelè dodged and fled.

It then happened that Yainkelè, the omnipresent, seeing his enemy Shimmelè in distress, was so filled with joy thereat that he could not contain it, and fell to slapping

his knees and yelling delightedly, "The meshuggener Yüd is after him—the meshuggener Yüd——"

In all his short life Yainkelè had never come across a good thing that he did not spoil it, and, to his dismay, he suddenly found the lame man's wrath turned upon himself. He turned and fled shrieking after Shimmelè, while Shayè stumped in pursuit, roaring frightful oaths and brandishing his stick in the air.

The news rushed through the Gass like wildfire. In a moment the street was full of frightened mothers.

"Wai geschrieen! Where is my Fish-elè?—my Baerelè?—my Hirshelè? Have you not heard? The madness is again upon him. He is pursuing little children and rending them in pieces!"

It was his good friend Mendel Schuster who captured Shayè, and brought him to his house. There he forced him upon a bed. Then he gave him a drink of brandy.

This latter unwonted munificence so dazed Shayè that he lay quite still with wonder; nor could he arise when he would, for no sooner did he stir than both Mendel and his wife Gitel waved their hands frantically at him, hissing, "Sh—sh!"

Shayè stared with utter amazement.

"Mendel Schuster," said he, at length, "wilt thou please tell me what means all this nonsense?"

The good pair stared at him with frightened faces, but said nothing.

"Have you two and all the Gass gone mad?" cried Shayè then.

At this Mendel began to back toward the door with every sign of terror, while Gitel burst into tears, and cried in a hoarse whisper, "For God's sake, Mendel, why does Eisak not come with the Doctor?"

This broke the last strand of Shayè's patience. He sprang from the bed, and burst into a storm of abuse, stumping about the room, and rapping out oaths at lightning

speed. Gitel fled, but as for Mendel, a great calm began to spread over his face.

“As I live,” he faltered, “I begin to mis-doubt—thou speakest so—so like thy natural self——”

“What! natural self! Ass’s-head, I’ll break every bone in thy crooked old carcass if thou speakest not at once!” roared Shayè.

Then Mendel smiled. “Thank God,” he said, and sighed comfortably. “Forgive me, Shayè, my friend; I see now we have made a great mistake. Thou art, unbeschrieen, healthy and well—very healthy and well.”

But Shayè was by no means calmed.

“Why should I not be healthy?” he shouted.

Mendel looked embarrassed.

“Sit!” cried Shayè then, forcing Mendel into a chair, “and there thou sittest until thou tellest me, once for all, what means all this Meshuggas [craziness].

A SINNER IN ISRAEL

Thinkest thou I see not that things are not as they used to be? The people shun me like the pest. When I come, all stand aside with a to-do as if I were a field-marshal. I have thought, 'Someone has again spread an evil report about thee; wait, it will pass over,' but it does not pass over. Now I will know why."

"It is because they fear thee," ventured Mendel, timidly.

"Yes, that I see, that they fear me. They fled before me, and barred their doors as before the enemy, but why, I ask thee—why?"

Mendel wavered. Shayè insisted, and at last he wormed it out of him.

"It is because of what happened in thy great sickness," began Mendel with much hesitation. "Thou wast then so bad—my worst enemy I do not wish to be as thou wast. And in the end yet thou didst become possessed of a frightful desire. God have mercy!—what thinkest thou, Shayè?"

—Chazer [pig] thou didst wish to eat—salt pork and just salt pork. Bitter tears didst thou weep over it, until at last the Doctor said one should give it thee, lest thou die. What was to be done? So Eisak Schulklopper brought thee a bit from the inn and thou—thou didst eat it.”

“It was not even good pork—rancid as an old boot,” said Shayè.

Mendel stared.

“What!” he cried, “thou knewest what thou didst?”

“Why should I not have known?” said Shayè.

“And wast not meshuggè?”

“Wie haisst, meshuggè?” said Shayè.

Mendel clasped his hands, and shook his head in utter amazement and disgust.

“That thou art a big Poshè [sinner] I have always known,” he said, “but *what* a big rascal thou art, *that* I see now first!”

“Nu, nu,” said Shayè, “I am not the worst by a long shot, and the Almighty

will not be too hard on me for that bit of pork, for He saw it was in my great despair I ate it. And so the people thought I was crazy—hm—a pack of sheep's-heads!—but thou, Mendel, that thou shouldst be such a fool—that I wonder at. Canst not see why I wished to eat that pork?”

“May the lightning strike me if I can see it!”

“Nu, so I will tell thee,” said Shayè. “Seest thou, as I was lying there in my great sickness, and it was already time to call the Chevra, I began to bethink me of my past life, and how I would soon stand in the presence of the Most High, His Name be praised! I have my little failings,—I do not deny it,—and when I remembered the sins I had committed, I tell thee I became afraid. Then all at once I seemed to see myself in the Hereafter, and I was led in at the door. There sat the Most High. What thinkest thou, Men-

del?—He looked just like the chief-rabbi of Prague, whom I once saw when I was a boy. There He sat in His big arm-chair, reading out of a thick book, and stroking His long white beard. ‘Aha,’ He cried when He saw me, ‘here comes my Shayè Leben—a nice little Ganef [rascal]—here, bring me my book once,’ and they brought Him the book wherein are written down all the sins of the people. He turned over the pages, and when He came to my name He stopped. ‘Pfui!’ He said when He saw the long list of my sins, ‘may I live but that is a sinner—such a rascal we have not had up here in a long time. Wait, he will get his Makkes [beating]. Here, fetch thou thy Steckel [stick],’ He cried, and a big angel came forth—an arm he had like a blacksmith and a stick as thick as a fist. I tell thee, my hair stood on end when I saw it. And then the Most High, His Name be praised! began to read off the sins—sins that I usser remembered even in

my dreams. Right at the beginning He began: 'Fifty licks because he ran away from home; his parents, nebbich, worried their hearts out over him—usser was he worth it,' said the Most High, and klup! klup!—down came the stick of the big angel on my back. And so it went—twenty licks for this, and thirty licks for that. Forty licks for the debt he owes Hendel Feder-schleisserin, who is, God knows, a pious and hard-working woman,' said the Most High, and 'twenty licks for the lard cakes he ate,' and so on and so on, page after page, until the cold sweat broke out on me with terror. And every time when I thought, now He is done, He turned another page and began anew. 'Woe is me,' I cried in my heart, 'I cannot bear this. When will this end? When will this end? But it did not end. Now see, Mendel, I have eaten much Trefa [unclean] in my life,—stewed rabbits, and beef fried in butter, bacon and roast pork, and all kinds of

Chazer, but—'tis the truth I'm telling thee—never in my life had I tasted one bit of salt pork; so, as I lay there in my agony, I thought, 'Wait, before I die I will yet eat a bit of salt pork; then, when the Most High, His Name be praised! will cry out, 'Ten licks for the salt pork he ate'—then I will know—at last! thank God! at last it is the end!' "

V

NITTEL-NACHT



V

NITTEL-NACHT

A dark and biting winter afternoon, and yet the streets are swarming with people. Shops are bright with gilded sweets and holiday wares; from every chimney rises the sweet smell of holiday dishes;—Christmas, the great festival of the nations is at hand, and everywhere there is light and life and merry, bustling preparation. Everywhere?—no, not quite everywhere. There is one street—a narrow, dingy one, so dark and dull that it would appear as if all the gloom crowded out of the town by the holiday spirit had sought and found shelter there.

Within the tall, crooked houses, the women go about with troubled faces; the men are still in the streets hawking their small wares. Now and then the musical

drone of prayers breaks through the stillness; all else is silent and gloomy.

From a poor room of one of the houses comes the sound of weeping. It is Veitel Packelträger's home, and within, Veitel himself,—the patient, the diligent,—is lying on his bed by day, while Rochel, his wife, with two children dragging at her skirts and one at the breast, goes about complaining:

“Who will earn bread for the little ones, when thou liest there with an injured foot? How couldst be such a Shlemiel, Veitel!”

“God has helped thus far—He will help further,” replies the more optimistic Veitel. “Do thou but tend to thine own affairs, and send at last that gift to Herr Bürgermeister.”

“Shema!—now he would lay this blame also on my head,” cries Rochel, and falls to weeping silently.

Alas, the spirit of gloom is lodging in Veitel Packelträger's home. The

sources of his troubles are twofold. One lies in the circumstance which Veitel's name indicates; namely, that he is a Packelträger [pack-carrier], a bearer of burdens, whose business in life it is to carry heavy loads from morning till night. On a recent day, when, as often before, his zeal outran his strength, he had stumbled, and dropped one of the iron bars with which he was laden on his foot, and now he lay a helpless sufferer, and there was none to earn bread.

The source of the other trouble is a deeper and more permanent one. It lies in no less a circumstance than this: that Prodow, the town in which Veitel lives, is a "Trefa-Mokum" [literally, unclean place]; in other words, a place forbidden to Jews.

Sixty-three so-called "tolerated Jews" are lawful residents therein, much to the indignation of its pious Gentile burghers; but since these sixty-three are the fertile source

of the city's funds, their presence must needs be endured.

Veitel Packelträger is not of the tolerated. He is too poor; for "toleration" is a high-priced privilege. His presence in the town is a breach of the law; yet he is there, and like him many others, for in those places where it is lawful for Jews to live, the crowding is too dense, the competition too keen, and only the sharpest wits can there survive. Veitel, alas, has little wit; only a pair of strong shoulders. He asks nothing but to be allowed to make a beast of burden of himself for a pittance, to labor in peace; but he may not. Three times with the others not tolerated has he been driven out of the town; but the cry of hungry children was stronger than the arm of the law, and three times did he come crawling back.

For the last few years he has had comparative peace,—if peace it may be called, to rise at morn in trembling and go to bed

in fear,—yet let none suppose the law had gone suddenly blind, or that it slept. No, it was wide awake; its eyes closed designedly, but not so tight that they did not blink with greedy desire at the tribute of purses of coin and tubs of butter, of casks of wine and fat geese, which the Jews laid yearly upon the altar of its goodwill.

Veitel Packelträger's annual offering to the law, whose tangible form was Herr Bürgermeister, was the product of one fat goose, his only wealth, which Rochel tended and fed with pious ardor, for thereby hung the family weal or woe. Now Christmas eve, the time of the sacrifice, was at hand, and Veitel's offering was not yet placed.

"Now get the Yüngel [little boy] ready; He must carry the gift there at once," Veitel was crying from his bed.

"Shema," cried his wife, "the child I should send!"

“Who then? Me, perhaps? No one will eat him.”

“Nay, nay,—rather I will go myself.”

“Shah—nonsense! thou talkest like a Goyah [Christian woman],” cried Veitel, and gazed with some alarm at his pretty wife, whose twenty-five years, in spite of poverty and care and child-bearing, lay but lightly on her graceful head.

“Veitel,—hast forgotten—Nittel-Nacht! Wait—perhaps grandfather will soon be home from Schul. Thou wouldst not send the child out alone among them—and just to-night?”

“Grandfather!—Grandfather is himself a child. Why didst not have our gift ready in time?” cried Veitel.

“Must I tell thee again? Two hours I waited in Nossen Schochet’s [Nathan the slaughterer’s] house. Nu, certainly;—first comes Frau Parnassin, then Frau Wool Merchant—anybody first—Rochel the wife of a Packelträger can wait!”

“Dost think I have no heart in my body? But what’s to be done? Hirshl must go,—have I money for a messenger? With thy lingering about thou wilt yet bring us and the whole Kille [community] to destruction.”

Rochel wrung her hands in fear for her child, but her husband’s last argument was too fully convincing. Did they not exist at the mere whim and pleasure of the Bürgermeister? His displeasure might mean suffering for the whole community. With an aching heart she placed the pot of white goose-oil and the large creamy liver, wrapped in many cloths, into a basket, and hung it upon Hirshl’s arm, fortifying him the while with advice and warnings.

“Of all things, Hirshl, my life, do not pass the church. Thou knowest how they are. They might think thou wert trying to peep in, and might, God forbid, do thee an injury—and if thou meetest anyone,

hide in the shadow, or if they notice thee, step aside into the gutter, and pull thy cap politely, and if anyone asks thee what thou carriest, say they are old shoes from the cobblers, and if they would molest thee,—run, run as fast as thou canst.”

Hirshl was a little, thin boy with a soft child's face, out of which shone strangely wide, dark, half-shrewd, half-melancholy eyes. He knew that his errand was not void of dangers; for Christmas eve, Nittel-Nacht [St. Nicholas night], as it was called, had always been a favorite time for Jew-raids, when the people fresh from church, where the priests had fired them with religious zeal, delighted in plundering and murdering the Jews in the name of Christ, their Lord.

He knew that his father and the other men in the Gass always remained awake on this night, that they might be prepared in case of danger; but he also knew all the good hiding-places, all the dark windings

and alley-ways of the town. So, grasping his basket firmly, he set out on his errand.

Up to the end of the Jews' street he walked at ease, but at the corner, where began the enemy's world, he stopped like a frightened hare, scenting the hunter's hounds. The street seemed peaceful and empty; and swiftly, noiselessly he hurried on. He passed the cemetery without a tremor; on that night it was but the living he feared. The next turning brought him to the church. He remembered his mother's warning not to pass it, but just beyond shone a bake-shop window sparkling with Christmas splendor. He longed to have a peep at all that glory. No one was stirring,—he would risk it.

Just as he came opposite the church door, it opened, and forth came a group of laughing men and girls who hurried away, the last one leaving the door ajar. From the shadow into which he had crept,

Hirshl could look within, down to the shining altar, where hung a half-naked, blood-stained effigy of Jesus of Nazareth.

"It is their God," he thought, and gazed with fear and loathing at the ghastly figure. In his mind there loomed mystically, vaguely but fearfully, the consciousness that the source of all their troubles lay in that horrible figure.

How spectral the gloom of those shadowy naves! What harrowing mysteries hid behind those dark chancel doors! Was it there they kept that awful host, on account of which the Jews had to stay in their houses during Passion Week, and which bled—so the Christians said—when a Jew looked upon it? Then a chancel door began slowly and noiselessly to slide ajar, and Hirshl turned, and fled in terror.

The next turning brought him to the Rathhaus Square, which he dared not cross, for it was forbidden to Jews. As he was about to go another way, his foot-

steps were arrested by the sound of shouting voices, crying:

“Jew dog, damned hound!”

He knew these sounds but too well. It was one of the Gass in trouble. Creeping swiftly to the corner, he saw a pack of rowdy boys pursuing an old, feeble man, who, gasping and trembling, stumbled painfully along, dodging their missiles, and looking about with wild, hunted eyes.

“Dedè [grandfather]!” shrieked Hirshl. He had recognized his grandfather. With a bound he was at the old man’s side, dragging him to the corner and into a dark door-way. The old man was panting hard and trembling like a leaf. Hirshl, too, was trembling, but it was with impotent hate and fear and deep, deep pity. He soothed the old man’s hand lovingly, and his tears fell hot and fast upon it.

“What art doing out so late alone, Hirshl Leben?” said his grandfather at last.

“Did they hurt thee, Dedè?” sobbed Hirshl.

“Nay, nay,—do not weep—’twas only a little dirt,” and patiently and stolidly the old man wiped the mud off his wrinkled face and white beard.

“Why, O why didst thou go on the Rathhaus Square! Dost not know it is forbidden?” cried Hirshl.

“Why should I not know? But it was dark, and with all the people and noise my head went like a mill-wheel,—I must have lost the way.”

“Why wast not in Schul?—Where didst get that basketful of apples?—Why wast walking in the street?” questioned Hirshl.

“Esoi!” said the old man, for he could not tell Hirshl how he had sat behind the stove, until the thought that his son-in-law Veitel was lying ill, and there was none to earn anything, and he himself was ever eating the bread of idleness, became more painful than he could endure; and how, in-

stead of going to Schul, he had bought a basket of apples, and had gone to peddle among the school-children.

“Esoi!” repeated the grandfather, “a Yüngel [little boy] does not need to know everything,” and Hirshl questioned no more. He knew that his grandfather was very old, and sometimes childish, when he did foolish things. He started again on his errand, but his progress now was slow, for he had to lead the old man, whose feet were stiff with cold. At length they arrived at the Bürgermeister’s house. Hirshl delivered his basket, and received as reward a gilded cake, but, knowing it to be Trefa [unclean], he dropped it into the gutter. Then they mended their pace and arrived at home unmolested.

It was the custom of the men to spend the night in groups, playing cards, that in case of a raid they might not be taken in their sleep, and even the most pious did not condemn a game on this occasion. On ac-

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

count of Veitel's injured foot, his neighbors agreed to meet in his room, and soon after supper they began to arrive.

Rochel had put the younger children to bed, but fully dressed, that no time might be lost in case of danger. Hirshl as the eldest had permission to remain awake. He now sat at the corner of the table where the men were playing, watching the game and listening to their conversation.

They spoke of many things; but through it all, like the warp of a cloth upon which the rest is woven, ran the complaining about the Gentiles; but Joel Wineseller, who was a great wit, cracked jokes continually.

The grandfather, who had been praying all the evening, now closed his prayer-book, and then he rehearsed again the pitiful tale of his street encounter.

"If I were a man, I would kill them," cried Hirshl, his eyes flashing rage.

"Still, still," cried the grandfather, "do not add to thy sins. It is on account of

our iniquities that we are punished and in Golus [exile].”

Jacob Sofer now began to tell a harrowing tale of Polish persecutions, when, on a certain Christmas eve, a whole congregation had taken refuge in their synagogue; how there they had fought for their lives, and how, with their own hands, they had killed their wives and daughters rather than let them fall alive into the hands of the Christians. Others told similar tales, and Hirshl listened, white with horror.

“Why, O why are the people so wicked?” he mused. “When I am a man I will be so good, so pious that the Lord will let us return to Yerushelaim where there are no wicked Goyim.”

Suddenly he was startled out of his musings by a cry of alarm.

“A knock,” gasped his mother, “did you not hear a knock?”

The company listened with white, strained faces. They started;—they had

heard it clearly now—it was a knock. Some one blew out the light; Rochel fled to the bedside of her children. In Hirshl's short life there lay the memory of a time of terror, when, clinging to his father's neck, they had fled in the night, and hidden in a cold, black forest. He clutched his grandfather's arm in agony, and they waited with bated breath for what would follow. But all remained still; only the wind moaned, and the shutters creaked. Some one took courage to look outside. The knock came again; then they saw that it was but a broken latch tapping in the wind.

They relit their candle, and sat down to renew their game. Rochel was weeping softly at her baby's cradle.

“My God,” she wailed, “why did we not remain in Fishow? They have it good—they live behind strong Ghetto gates.”

The men were playing as before, but they told no more harrowing tales. Joel

Wineseller's jokes fell on deaf ears; his laughter, too, was hollow. At every sound they started; they trembled at their own heart-beats.

The grandfather was busily praying again, shaking himself with pious ardor, and when he ceased, it was but to comfort Hirshl, and tell him of that glorious time when the Messiah would come; when all Israel would dwell at peace in Zion, each man under his own vine and fig-tree, in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord has promised.

And the long night dragged wearily on; the wind sighed and moaned; the feeble candle blinked and sputtered; and little Hirshl's soul was heavy with trouble and weariness. Then slowly and strangely the room waxed wide and bright, the murmuring voices came faint and distant, the wall of the house swelled like a mist, and Hirshl found himself standing in a large, fine square, just like the Rathhaus Square. Be-

fore him stood a beautiful building with a golden dome. The Holy of Holies shone at the top of a wide stair, and before it stood grandfather in a white robe as at the Seder; below were crowds of people all singing joyfully, and over all shone a bright golden light.

"It is Jerusalem," cried Hirshl, and clapped his hands, "and the light that shines over all, that is the Shechinah."

"Adon olom asher molach," sang the people, and Hirshl's heart leaped high with joy. He, too, would sing, "B'terem kol yezir nibro," and as he opened his lips—he awoke.

Alas, the glory of Zion was fled,—he was only at home in the Gass; but it was morning, and the terrors of the night were past.

How sweet the white light of day! How sweet the smell of the simmering soup-pot! How sweetest of all the strong comfort of his father's voice chanting the old familiar morning prayers!

VI

A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON



VI

A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

One fine day in spring, young Stephan came tearing from town on horseback, burst into the farmhouse kitchen, crying desperately:

“Uncle Pawel, Uncle Pawel, I’m undone! I must have a hundred Gulden at once, or be thrown into prison, and left there to rot.”

“One hundred Gulden! Whui!” cried Pawel Bauer. “It is all I have in the world, and my Anushka’s dowry at that. What mischief hast got into again?”

“So thou refusest?” cried Stephan.

“I need only twenty-five more, for Christoph says the day I lay him down one hundred and twenty-five, he marries my Anushka.”

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

“ Well, then, good-bye, and say a mass for my soul,” cried Stephan, hotly, and made for the door.

“ Wait, wait,—where goest in such a hurry? ”

“ To the devil! To throw myself into the well! ”

“ Wait, Stephanko, my boy,” pleaded Pawel, clutching his nephew’s coat-tails frantically. “ How can I know thou’lt pay me back? ”

“ Nothing easier,” said Stephan, instantly calm. “ I simply write thee a note, promising to pay on such and such a day. ’Tis as good as gold.”

In half an hour, young Stephan, chirping like a bird, was tearing townward, and Pawel stood spelling over a large scrawl, which read:

I promise to pay one hundred Gulden to Pawel Bauer on St. Pagnoocius Day.

Signed, Stephan Stadter, the Younger.

A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

Pawel put the note into the stocking, empty of the best part of Anna's dowry, and each Sunday took down his calendar to see whether Pagnoocius were not due that week; but spring waxed into summer, and summer waned into autumn, the harvest was in, and the twenty-five Gulden necessary to the consummation of Anna's matrimonial hopes lay beside the note, but Pagnoocius had not arrived.

"Anushka is not so young that she can wait!" scolded Buzhinka, her mother.

"Perhaps I've skipped him," mused Pawel, scratching under his cap. "I'm not so strong on print as I used to be."

"I'll go ask the priest," he decided.

The priest did not take down his calendar as Pawel expected, but, after a single glance at the note, threw himself into a chair, laughing uproariously.

"Pag-noo-oo-cius," he roared. "Ho,—ho— a comical rogue! I don't wonder thou foundest him not in the calendar;

truly 'tis the first time I ever heard of the gentleman. By all the saints, he has done thee, Pawel!"

Pawel looked blank.

"Thou hadst best consult a lawyer," advised the priest.

Advocat Hummel, grown old and wise in village practice, took the matter more gravely.

"Hm,—the note is good, but you cannot collect it," he said with fine logic. "He promises to pay, but there is no Pagnoocius."

"What's to be done? My Anushka's dowry!" lamented Pawel.

"My advice to you is to wait," said the lawyer, pocketing his fee. "Wait! Who knows, perhaps there may some day be such a saint."

Pawel went home in despair. Buzhinka swore mighty oaths, and Anna wept loudly into her apron.

It chanced that Anshel, the Jewish ped-

A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

dler, dropped in on his weekly rounds that day, and heard the story sympathetically.

“ I know someone can help thee, Pawel,” he said. “ Solomon Edelstein is his name, and he keeps a little wine-shop in our village, but he is a finished lawyer. A head on him—of iron, I tell thee,—he has helped more than one out of a pickle.”

Next day Pawel appeared with his friend Anshel before Solomon Edelstein, who, much to Bauer’s astonishment, neither laughed at the note nor looked grave; but after a careless glance into it, he laid it indifferently aside, and continued his reading in a large, yellow-leafed book.

Pawel’s hope sank like lead, but presently old Solomon raised his eye-brows wearily, drooped his head meekly to one side, and said in a small, sad voice:

“ On the second of November you’ll get your money.”

“ How so on the second?” questioned Pawel, dubiously.

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

Solomon did not reply. He was bending over his book again, intently reading.

"If the egg was laid on a Sabbath—" he murmured musically, his thumb wagging an active accompaniment, and Anshel with a knowing shrug took Pawel away.

The following week Pawel and old Solomon appeared at court, where young Stephan had been summoned for non-payment of his note.

"I do not refuse to pay," cried Stephan, smiling confidently. "As you see in the note, I promise."

"Fool," growled the judge, "Pagnocius! You can't collect on that. The note is no good. The case is dismissed."

"Pardon me," piped a small, sad voice, and all eyes turned to where little Solomon stood with his head drooping meekly to one side.

"Pardon me, Herr Richter. He must pay. The note is good. The note is very good."

A JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

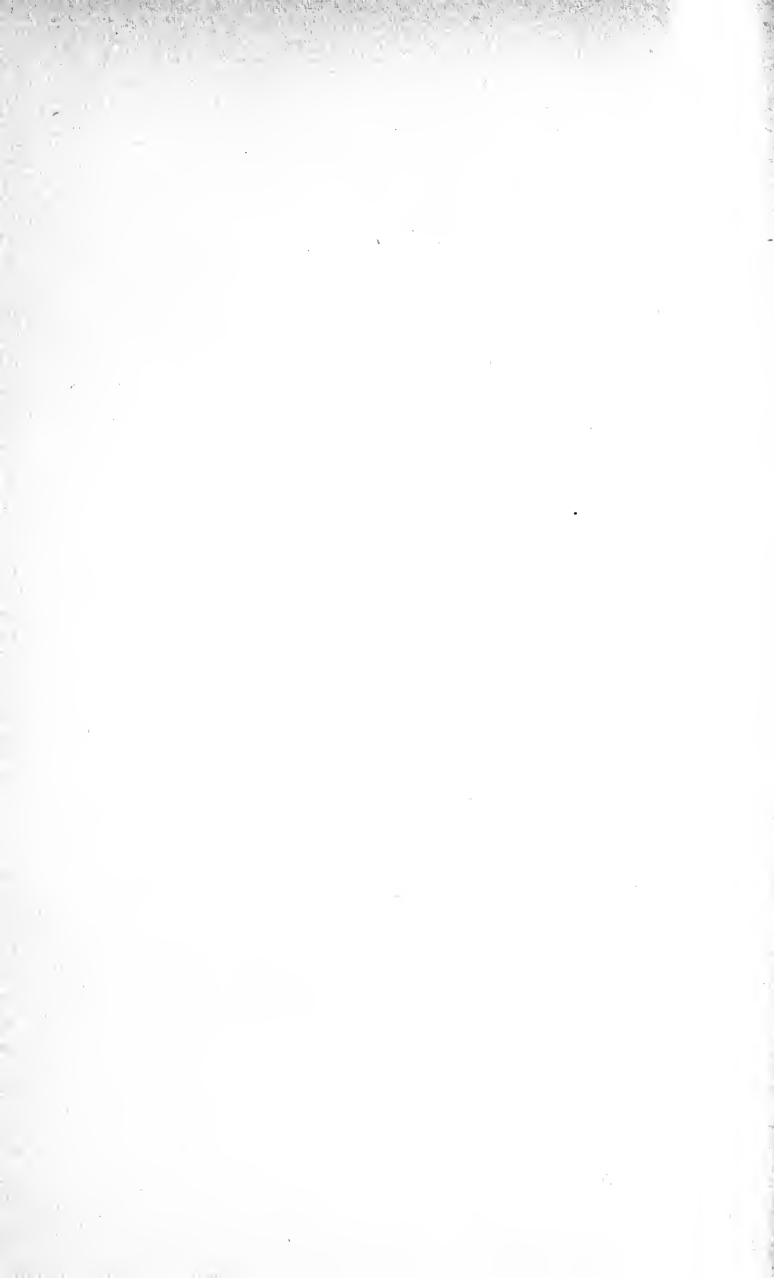
“So! Do you perhaps know when is St. Pagnoocius?” barked the judge.

“Why should I not know?” answered Solomon. “It is the day after to-morrow.”

“What? How? What do you mean?”

“Is not the day after to-morrow All Saints’ Day? Nu, if it is all saints’ day, Pagnoocius must also be among them.”

And they bought the raisins for Anushka’s wedding-cake that very day.



VII

A GOY IN THE GOOD PLACE



VII

A GOY IN THE GOOD PLACE

I

The first they knew of it in town was through Lottchen Schmidt, who had been playing at the river bank, and came home with a sock in her hand.

"A good sock," said her mother, in astonishment, and upon examining it more closely she found the letters "A. F." marked at the top. Everyone knew that these initials stood for Anton Flegel, and the double cross-stitch in which they were worked, and for which his mother had long been famous, completed the evidence.

"I wonder how this came by the river," mused Lottchen's mother, but, her imagination halting at the sock, she hurried across the street to consult the blacksmith's wife,

who immediately opened wide vistas of probabilities.

Before the gossip had spread a quarter of a mile, they carried the young man's body up the street. They had found it caught in the rushes by the willows where the river bends.

"Yesus Maria!" cried the women.

"So it had to come."

"I always knew he'd come to a bad end."

"Always running after that Protestant girl."

"Or sitting in the tavern."

"He must have drowned himself."

"Alas! his poor old father."

"We had better send for the old man," some one suggested after they had laid the corpse upon a bed, and covered the young face, in which the blood still tinted the cheeks, with a sheet.

Claus volunteered to go.

"He will break it gently," said the people, comfortably.

Claus was best fitted for a delicate errand, for he read books and knew what's what.

The last prominent landmark in the large barrenness of old Anton's mind was the visit of a troublesome relative from the country. Ten years had passed since that event, but he had not forgotten, for it was the one time in his life that he had been called from his work in the mills.

Thus when Claus came to him that day, saying simply: "Flegel, thou shouldst go home," the old man cried:

"What! Is she here again?"

"Nay," said Claus; "it's only Anton."

The old man paled a little.

"Yeh," sighed Claus, folding his hands as does the priest, "so it goes in this world. But what can one do? He's a little—a little dead, Anton."

II

Of all the pretty sights in town there was none more charming than the house of the priest, standing in its sunny garden next to the Catholic church. It was almost covered with blooming vines, out of which shining windows peeped like laughing eyes; fine grape-vines clustered on the garden walls, and in the yard fat geese waddled comfortably.

"Frau Köchin," who kept house for the priest, was as plump and comfortable as the geese, and though her hands were ever busy with rolling-pins and stewing-pans, her hair was always smooth as satin, her bodices tight and neat. As the people said, she was as fresh and round as a hard-boiled egg newly shelled.

She had two little red-cheeked children, who called the good priest "Uncle," and he was very fond of them—very fond, indeed, he was of these little children. Was it, perhaps, because their eyes, which were

blue and merry, so much resembled his own?

The setting sun was gilding the pebbles of the priest's neat gravel walk as old Anton Flegel, with bowed head and bent shoulders, came slowly along.

He went to the side door, which opened into the dining-room, judging from the inviting fragrance of browned butter which came from there that the priest was at supper; and he judged aright, for the half-open door disclosed the portly form of his Reverence seated at table with Frau Köchin and the little ones, where they had just finished eating a large dish of buttered asparagus.

Anton entered meekly with hat in hand.

"Your Reverence, my son is dead," he blurted out without invitation.

"So I have heard," replied the priest in compassionate and melting tones, though he wiped the butter from his mouth with care and folded his napkin neatly.

"The funeral—" began old Flegel.

"Dost not know that a suicide cannot lie in consecrated ground?" interrupted his Reverence in the same tender voice.

"A suicide!" cried Anton, aghast. "He was no suicide. He was walking in from Mühldorf, probably hot and tired, and took a cramp while bathing his feet."

"Ai, ai, Flegel," said the priest, with a significant nod; "everyone knows, too, why he went so often to Mühldorf—a Protestant wench."

"He would not have married her," protested Anton.

"A reckless, wicked lad," said the priest.

"He was a good son to me, your Reverence," pleaded Anton.

"It is but a just punishment from Heaven," cooed the priest, mournfully, lifting his hand as he did when he preached on Easter. "He was a great sinner. He had not been to mass or confession for years; he spent his money on a Protestant

wench and gave nothing to the Church, and therefore he died like an outcast, without absolution and the blessed sacrament. Alas! Anton, thou'lt need buy many masses for his soul, for he is damned and burns in hell fire."

Old Flegel paled and looked up with sad, bleared eyes.

"Yesus Maria! what shall I do?" he moaned. "Is there no place to bury him?"

"The town has a place for such as he," replied the priest, in the same tender tones.

"What! where the hanged man lies?" cried Anton, in horror.

"Ach, yes, this life is a vale of sorrows but the righteous will reap their reward in Heaven. Kathi, bring the poor man a cup of coffee and a bun," and the priest sighed, and undid the middle button of his coat, which drew an uncomfortable crease after meals.

The old man expostulated and entreated in vain.

“Put thy trust in God, my son, and pray to the blessed Virgin,” said the priest, leading Anton to the door, for he wished to be alone, that he might close his good-natured eyes, which were drooping for the want of his evening nap.

The old man wrung his hands silently as he walked away down the sunny garden path, past the fat geese and the gently stirring grape-vines.

III

Evening had descended still and dark over the town, and the stars glittered coldly in the sky, as Anton stood hesitatingly before the Protestant parsonage, and it was with fear and misgiving that he finally walked along the straight stone path up to the dark house, with bare walls and shuttered windows, and knocked timidly.

“The pastor is busy at his sermon,” said

the woman who opened the door, but the old man pleading earnest business, she led the way through a dark passage. Anton followed, staring vacantly at the dim outline of her tall, thin figure, and wondering vaguely at the low paper-like rustling, until he discovered that it came from Frau Pastorin's stiffly-starched white apron.

The pastor sat at his desk writing by the light of a lamp, which threw a circle of rays upon a plain pine floor, scoured to such a degree of whiteness that Anton feared to tread upon it. He turned as the old man entered, and said in a cold though kindly voice :

“ Good evening; pray, be seated.”

The old man gazed diffidently into a stern, thin face, whose deep-set eyes threw out lights like the glint of polished steel, which mated strangely with his gentle tones.

“ My son is drowned, your Reverence,” he essayed, trembling, at length.

"What, what—indeed! I am deeply grieved to hear it," cried the pastor. "And what can I do for you, my good man?"

"I thought perhaps—I beg of you—if you would kindly bury him."

"Are you not a Catholic?" said the pastor, in astonishment.

"Yes, your Reverence."

"And you come to me?"

"Yeh, what's to be done, your Reverence? Our Herr Pfarrer says he is a suicide, but he was not bad—only a little wild; they found him in the river. You know how it is—he died without the sacrament, and now he is damned and cannot lie in consecrated ground; oh, yeh!"

The pastor's lip curled; he viewed the old man with contemptuous silence for a moment, and then burst forth:

"Idolatry! bigotry! O, the horror of it—the benighted, priest-ridden mass! Do you really believe that a sinful mortal can absolve another's sin? Do you really believe

that the lack of a heathenish rite can exclude a sinner from Christ's mercy?"

He had leaped from his chair, and was striding the floor in great perturbation, the words of the proselytizing harangue with which he had for years assailed obstinate Orientals falling glibly from his lips, while Frau Pastorin's knitting needles clicked a fierce accompaniment.

"They keep you in ignorance and darkness, for they know that, like those poisonous night-blooms that wither at the first gleam of dawn, their false gods will shrink and die in the first ray of truth," he cried. "They keep from you the blessed light of the Testament. Throw off the bondage of ignorance and superstition; be one of us, brother. Join the true and only Church of Christ. Here, take this Testament, my friend; read there of the love of the Saviour, it shines in every line," and thus on, while Anton stared in dumb amazement, but half understanding, and wondering

vaguely what penance the priest would put upon him when he confessed to having listened.

When the pastor finally ceased, Anton rose and placed the Testament, which the former had forced into his hands, upon the chair.

"Keep it, you may take it with you," urged the pastor.

"I thank you, but it is not allowed," said Anton, simply.

The pastor uttered an exclamation of impatience and flung himself into his chair. Anton viewed him with sinking heart.

"Then you will not bury him?" he asked pleadingly.

"It is impossible unless you join the Church."

The old man fumbled his hat, then for a moment looked sly.

"I will pay well," he said.

"A Catholic cannot lie in our cemetery," said the pastor, and turning to his desk

A GOY IN THE GOOD PLACE

continued at his sermon, whose text was, "Blessed are the merciful."

Old Anton reeled as he turned out into the night, and walked under the coldly glittering stars.

IV

It was on a dim, rainy morning, in a dark yard of a dirty, narrow street, that old Anton stood gazing perplexedly about him, staring alternately at a dingy, peak-roofed little building which had been pointed out to him as the synagogue, and a crooked little house to which he had been directed as the rabbi's dwelling.

The air was full of evaporations from the puddles of water that lay about, while through them the spirit of a neighboring tannery and the oily ghost of Frau Rebbetzin's latest "Kraut Strudel" struggled for supremacy.

Anton heard voices in the house, but saw no way of entering, for, being a stranger,

he did not know that the door was down the crevice by the fence, where fat people went in sideways.

Presently the back door of the synagogue opened, and a thin, dark man in carpet slippers and wearing an old silk hat upon his head emerged.

"Are you the priest?" ventured Anton, doubtfully.

The rabbi smiled, drew up his shoulders, threw out his hands and cried:

"Wie haisst? Do I look like a priest? The priest unbeschrieen has quite a different shape. He could swallow me whole and still find room for a Yontow dinner," and he chuckled softly at his own joke.

Anton could make nothing out of this, so he answered simply:

"They told me I could find the Jew priest here. My son is drowned" he added huskily.

"Shema!" shrieked the rabbi. "He is drowned? Your son? How so—where—

how did it happen? What a misfortune! Come with me quick! Hm—hm—hm—,” and he hurriedly led the way into the house.

“Sarah,” he cried at the door, “bring a little brandy, quick. What thinkest thou, this poor man’s son is drowned!”

“Drowned!” screamed the rabbi’s fat wife. “Wai geschrieen! In the river, was it not? I always knew it would happen—wading and swimming—and God only knows what else—wai, wai, wai—.”

“Get the brandy, Sarah Leben, and talk later,” cried the rabbi.

After they had urged the old man to drink, and Sarah with one sweep had cleared a chair of a bundle of soiled clothes, a book, and a pan of potato parings, that the old man might be seated, they plied him with a hundred questions, through the distractions of which Anton told his story as best he could.

The rabbi grasped his beard, swayed

himself from side to side, and at the pathetic places murmured, "Hm—hm" and "Wai, wai," while the more tender Sarah wiped away her tears on a dirty silk apron.

"And now I've come to you to bury him," was the end of Anton's tale.

"To me!" cried the rabbi, with a violent gesture. "I am a Jew."

"Yesus, I know it, and it is bitter enough," cried Anton, "but what can I do? The Pfarrer says he cannot, the Pastor says he dare not."

The rabbi reflected. He looked pityingly at the old man's bent head and his dim eyes, swollen and red with unshed tears, striding the while up and down the length of the room; sometimes clutching his beard dejectedly, sometimes gesticulating as if in triumph.

"Sarah," he cried at length determinedly, "go, call Chayim."

Chayim was Sarah's uncle, and the president of the Schul; what he lacked in his

learning, which was confined solely to the knowledge of wines and liquors, he supplied in wealth and dignity, and not alone his position, but his pride, demanded that he be consulted on all matters congregational. He was proud of his learned nephew, however, in the presence of whose superior knowledge authority dwindled to mere form, and whose policy was to ask his president's advice in all humility, and then do as he pleased.

The Jews of this town, as of all others, were neighborly, and Chayim had not far to come.

Anton repeated his story for him, but this time the rabbi ended it, saying resolutely:

“And we must bury him.”

“What!” cried Chayim. “A Goy in the ‘good place.’ Bistu meshuggè! We cannot do such a thing. We dare not!”

“My dear uncle Chayim Leben,” replied the rabbi in sweetest tones, “thou know-

est I value thy word like pure gold, but when it comes to a matter of law, thou hadst best leave it to me. Not only dare we, we should! We must! It's a Mitzwah."

Here was a grand opportunity, particularly since a stranger was present, for Chayim to display the iron hand of authority, and though he had never read a line of Gemorah in his life, he blew out his cheeks, and assumed the argumentative tone of a Talmudist.

"If," he said, beginning on a high note and throwing out his thumb, "our rules declare we dare not sell a plot of our burial-ground to a Goy, how—" at the bottom of the scale and rising—"are we going to do it?"

The good rabbi's patience was as short-lived as it was sweet, and Chayim's foolish pretense at knowledge was always the point at which it broke.

"Chammer," he roared. "Did I say we'll sell it to him? We'll give it to him!"

A GOY IN THE GOOD PLACE

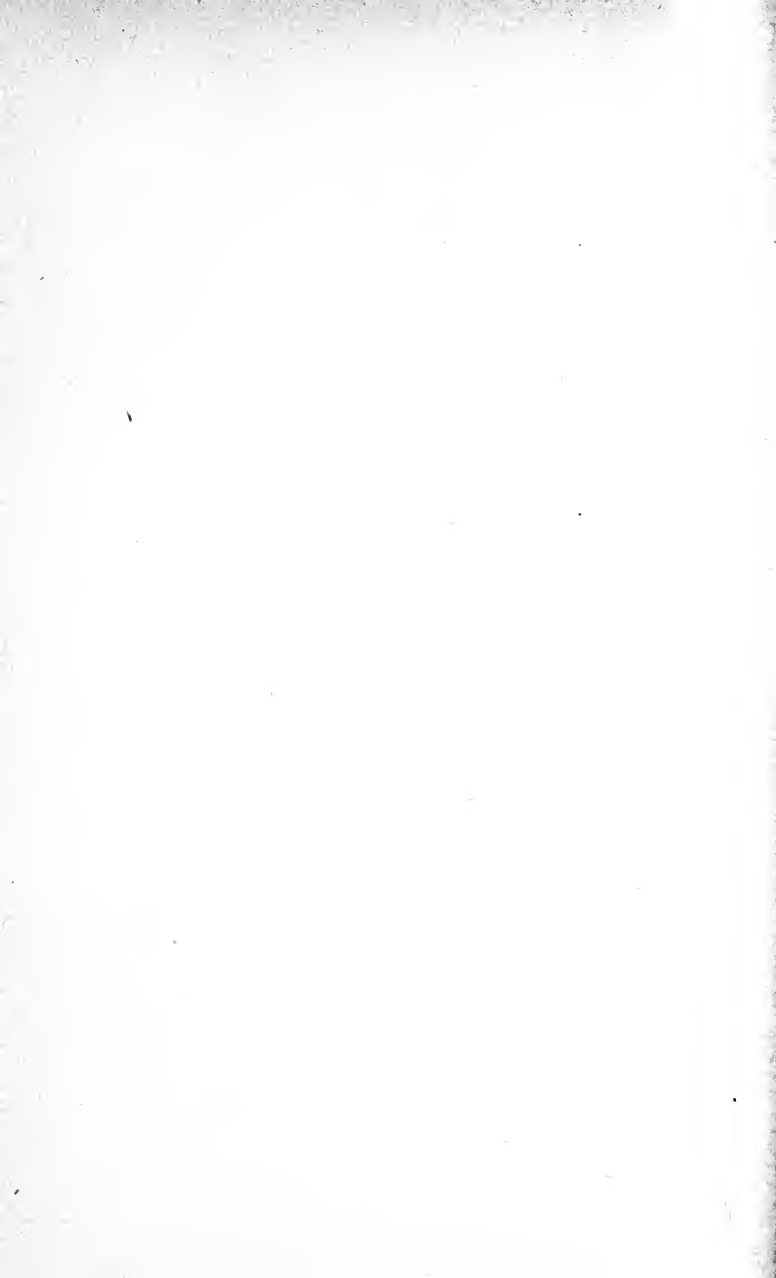
And so they did.

There were scrupulous people who threw up their hands and cried in horror, "A Goy in the 'good place!'" There were others who prophesied dire misfortunes, but in spite of these the young man was laid away in a corner of the little Jewish cemetery, the rabbi read the burial service, and all the pious women wept at the grave.

Yet nothing disastrous happened; life in the Gass went on as before in its dull, even round, and the young Goy and his grave were soon forgotten.

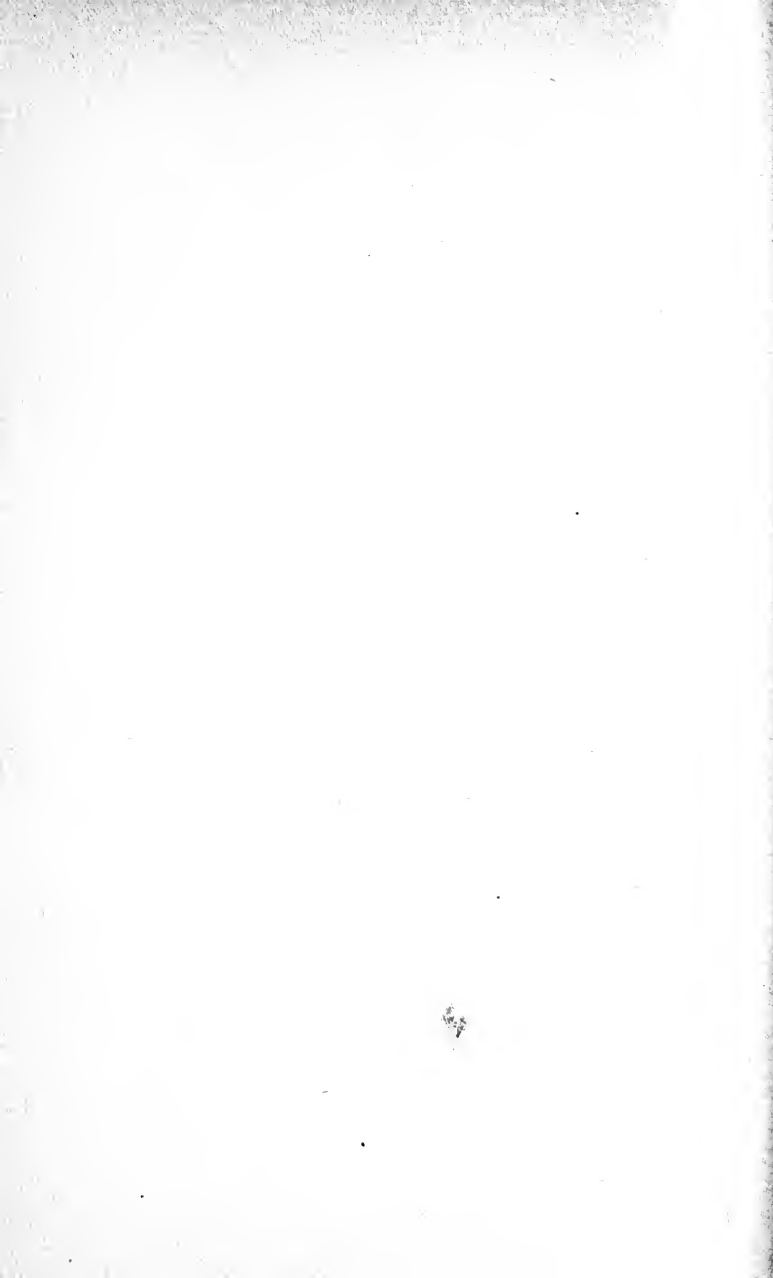
If one should visit this little Jewish cemetery, he could find in a corner, and with but little seeking, a neglected grave, and, sunk deep among the long, tangled grasses, a flat headstone, upon which he might read to this very day the inscription:

"Anton Flegel.
He rests in Christ."



VIII

GENEDEL THE PIOUS



VIII

GENENDEL THE PIOUS

All ideas are relative, not alone in the world at large but also in the Gass. But in the Gass one is more definite. One does not say of a man vaguely, "He is rich," and leave you distractedly guessing how much it is that he has got.

No, one says "a solider Balbos;" then you may know that his income is about three hundred Gulden. When one says "a ganzer Rothschild," it is perhaps six hundred. But when one throws out one's hands, purses up one's lips, and, rolling one's eyes heavenward, cries, "Pui, a Chotzen!" you may know that he has at least a thousand a year.

And as to his material, so as to his spiritual estate, they leave you not in doubt. When a person is reasonably pious, one

says of him, he is "a Zaddik." When he persistently refuses to take from a Gentile a cup of coffee—even without milk—one says "a Chossid." But when his piety reaches its utmost bounds, leaps over and runs wild, one says "a whole Genendel," for Genendel had become a proverb in the Gass.

She was so pious that even frumm Loebelè said:

"Would that mine were but a little piece of Genendel's portion of Gan Eden [Paradise]."

There was not a fast nor a feast, not a holiday nor half-holiday, not a law or an ordinance nor an inspected law or ordinance that Genendel did not keep, but synagogue-going was her strongest point.

There might have been women in the Gass who approached her in this, but to equal her there was none.

So firmly established was her synagogue-going, that when she suddenly left it off,

the Gass for a while quite lost its equilibrium, and before it regained its balance, Yainkelè, Eisak Schulklopper's, had got a terrible dose of Makkes; but how this happened shall be narrated later. First of Genendel this: spiritually she represented the very essence of beauty, but the visible part of her was just a dried up little mother with a wizened face, stoop-shoulders, and a 'Scheitel.' Further, a bundle,—large, bulky, and squarish,—which contained her old prayer-book, carefully screened from profane eyes and sheltered from the weather by the white cloth into which it was devotedly knotted. The rest, a long thread-bare shawl and a headkerchief, which had once glowed grandly with a border of pink and purple acorns, but whose frayed edges had been so often trimmed and hemmed again, that it now was but a black wisp, whose short ends fluttered limply in the wind, and let all the cruel snowflakes sting Genendel's neck.

Genendel was very poor. Even the Gass admitted this; and when one is poor in the Gass, one is most wofully poor. Also she was proud; at any rate so the Gass thought, for she kept to herself, and let no one pry into her affairs, and when in her bitterest days one asked sympathetically, "How goes it, Genendel?" she did not wail, "Wai, mir," but set her lips, and answered curtly, "Nu, it goes," which translated into clear language means, "Mind thine own affairs."

She lived in a single small room, and she lived quite alone, for her only son—the last of six—had gone to America, and there, in the wicked New World, he had forgotten his old mother. But Genendel never complained. At least no one ever heard her. It may be that she complained to God, for she went to Schul twice every day. This, as every one knows, is not even proper for a woman; but still Genendel did it. And there in a corner of the women's gallery

GENENDEL THE PIOUS

she prayed out of her old black Siddur; and sometimes, when the cold had been most cruelly bitter, and her soup most pitifully thin, slow tears would drop upon its yellow pages.

And now comes the tale of how Eisak Schulklopper's Yainkelè got his dose of Makkes—for once in his life quite unjustly. It happened in this wise.

One Sunday morning Yainkelè lay even later than usual abed, and though his mother had twice called, "Out with thee, lazybones,—thou'lt be late for school!" he did not budge.

"'Tis not time yet," said Yainkelè, at length.

"How dost know?"

"Genendel has not gone to Schul yet;" for Genendel was Yainkelè's clock, and he had his eyes on the synagogue door. So when Yainkelè arrived at the Cheder a full hour late, Reb Itzig Melamed began

to beat him soundly, nor did he desist when Yainkelè roared:

“Can I help it? Genendel did not go to Schul to-day.”

“What?” cried Reb Itzig. “Art dreaming?—art still asleep? Wait, I’ll wake thee up!” and leathered away more vigorously than before.

A group of gossips in Maryam’s Back-stub that day discussed it thus:

“By rights,” said one, “the Makkes should have been Genendel’s, for after all these years how was Yainkelè to know that she would not go to Schul to-day?”

“Perhaps she is sick,” suggested some one.

“Adrabbè,” said another, “she is very well. When I heard that she had not been to Schul, I went at once to see if aught be wrong with her, and I found her knitting by a nice warm stove and singing thereto—I tell you, like the Rodower Chazan on Simchas Thora.”

GENENDEL THE PIOUS

" 'Twas a bitter day," said another, " and Genendel is getting old."

" Nay, 'twas not the weather either, for right in the thickest of the storm she was seen going to Machel Katzev's, where she bought a half pound of meat."

" A half pound of meat! Genendel must have money."

" Why has she not money? "

" Shtuss! From where should Genendel get money? "

" She received money from that Poshè Berl, her son."

" How knowest thou that? "

" Have you not heard that she got a letter? "

" Truly, we have heard. The letter was from Poland."

" The letter was from America."

" From America? " cried they all. " Who told thee? "

" Gitel told me. She was so fidgety with wishing to know from whom it was,

that Shayé Soldat said he would go find out."

"What, Shayé asked Genendel? I do not believe it. She would have thrown him out."

"He did not ask her. Trust Shayé, that Ganef, to find out what he wishes to know. 'Hast heard, Genendel,' he said, 'the bad news from America?' 'Nay,' Genendel said, 'what news?' 'They have had such a drought there that the creek ran dry, whereupon it grew so cold that the town-pump froze up, and the people nearly perished with a water famine,' Shayé said. Genendel looked real worried. 'A water famine in America! Strange that he should not have mentioned it,' she said."

"It must have been from Berl."

"From whom else but from Berl?"

But the surprising fact that Genendel had not gone to Schul on a certain day was presently drowned in the amazing circumstance that she now ceased entirely from

going. Skeptics did not believe it, and they went at prayer-time to walk past her window. From thence they brought wild reports,—such as this:

“She no longer eats meat on one day and the soup on the next; but both together—the meat and the soup in a single day.” And this:

“She stuffs her stove full of wood, as if she were the Countess of Reichenberg.” Also this:

“She has a new Sabbath-pot.”

The scandal of Genendel's defection became so great, that the noise of it reached even the rabbi, Reb Yoshè Levisohn, that great Chossid of whom it is said, “He is so deep in his studies that usser does he know, is he living or is he not living.” At noon his wife must place the dish before him and the fork at his hand.

“Why dost disturb me? What is this?” grumbles the great Reb Yoshè.

"This is thy dinner," says the Rebbet-zin.

Then first does he know it is time to eat.

Reb Yoshè scorned the voice of gossip, but on a Sabbath morning he noticed that Genendel had not waited for him at the door of the synagogue to wish him "gut Shabbes," as for years had been her wont. So after his dinner he despatched his servant to see if aught be wrong with her.

And Mirl returned with this report:

"So may something be wrong with me as it is wrong with Genendel! A new silk apron she has—brown silk—a Gulden the yard—and a new lace cap with a purple ribbon in it, and stewed apples and raisins she is eating,—I tell you by the table-spoonful."

Reb Yoshè eyed his servant gravely.

"Envy is the rottenness of the bones," he said; whereat Mirl fled to the kitchen. But to his wife he said:

"What is this about Genendel?"

"Do I know? Do I listen to the gossip of the people? They say her son Berl sends her much money from America," said the Rebbetzin.

Reb Yoshè looked perplexed.

"For more than twenty years,—in her widowhood,—in her poverty,—when her children died, she has been going to Schul—and now in her prosperity—" He stroked his beard thoughtfully. "I think I'll go see Genendel," he said.

Then word went forth that the Rav, the great Reb Yoshè Levisohn, who rarely went into another's house, was coming to Genendel, and officious ones ran to tell her of it, and also to see her wither. But she did not wither. No, she laid a new white cloth upon the table; placed thereon her Kiddush-cup, and rolled beside it her own arm-chair. And when he came, she said, "God's welcome, Rebbe Leben," bade him be seated, and gave him wine and cake. Nay, nay—none of your raisin wine and

home-made Dalklech. 'Twas real red wine that one buys at Reb Shlomè's for heavy money, and the cakes were of Maryam's best.

Genendel's eyes grew moist as she gazed at the great Reb Yoshè partaking of her hospitality.

"May the Rebbe live a hundred years," she cried. "I would that my Ephroim—he rests in Paradise—had lived to see this happy day when the Rebbe—his virtues be to us a blessing—honors my poor dwelling. I beg the Rebbe to bless me." And she bent her head, and the rabbi laid his hands upon it and blessed her, while Genendel sobbed aloud in pure happiness and pride.

"Is it true," said the rabbi, when Genendel had dried her eyes and stood again smiling before him, "is it true, what is said of thee, that thou no longer goest to Schul?"

"It is true," said Genendel.

"Wie haisst?" said the rabbi.

Genendel smiled sweetly.

"The Rebbe has not forgotten my son Berl, who went to America and of whom the people said bitter things—that he has deserted his old mother—and worse. It is not true, Rebbe. He is a good son. He has not forgotten me. He had, alas, much bad fortune, there in America, but now, thank God, it goes well with him. He now sends me twenty Gulden every month, and says he will send it so long as I live." Genendel paused.

"Nu?" said the rabbi.

"So why should I go to Schul, Rebbe Leben?" said Genendel.

Now the Rav was a great scholar, a Talmid Chochem, a rare Lamden, but it is a fact that at this moment he found not a word of reply. He sat quite still with his mouth open.

"If anyone had told me this of thee," he said at length, sadly, "I should not have believed it."

It was Genendel now who looked surprised.

“Wie haisst, Rebbe?” she said in much distress.

“‘Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked—then he forsook God who made him,’” quoted Reb Yoshè in Hebrew, which Genendel did not understand at all. “Now that the Lord has provided for thee, thou no longer hast need of Him—what?” he went on in Genendel’s own tongue.

“It is as the Rebbe says,” said Genendel, simply.

“And thou art not even ashamed to confess it? How was I deceived in thee, Genendel! I thought thou wast like them of whom it is written, ‘Happy are they that dwell in Thy house, they do praise Thee continually.’”

Genendel looked puzzled.

“Does the Lord really wish that?” she said incredulously.

“Wish what?”

“That one praise Him continually. I am only an ignorant woman, but, forgive me, Rebbe—that I do not believe. We all know what a Chossid is the Rebbe—how he does good to the poor—though, God knows, he has not much himself, and would eat dry bread the week round, were it not for the bit of butter which Malka Loew sends him. We all know how he does kindness to the Rodower Bochor,—how he gives him food and clothes and keeps him like a child of his house. Now supposing the Rodower should come every day before the Rebbe and cry out—‘O, I thank the Rebbe,—O, how good is the Rebbe—how kind, how noble, how wise is the Rebbe!’—would the Rebbe like that? Would he not tell him to hold his tongue? Would he not throw him out of the house?”

Reb Yoshè eyed Genendel queerly, and something like a smile fluttered around his lips.

“Ah, so,—thou wouldst not anger the

Lord. Verily, Genendel thou wilt yet be wise, for it is written, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' " and Reb Yoshè laughed softly into his beard.

"Yes, Rebbe Leben—that is what I mean," cried Genendel. "It is because I fear the Lord that I do not go to Schul. Many a day I feel that I would like to go,—even though I no longer have need of it,—for it has become a strong habit with me, this Schul-going. But I do not go. I be-think me of a story which my father—peace be to him—used to tell, about their Count in Poland, where he lived. This Count was a very charitable man. Every day when he came out of his house to go to the hunt, his door-step would be full of beggars, and to all he gave. There was one beggar—his name was Mattis—who was there every day. No sooner did the Count come out of his door, than there was Mattis crying, 'O, your Grace, I am so poor and wretched.' And the Count would give him

bread or wood or money, as was his need. But in a day or two he would be there again, crying, 'O, your Grace, I am so poor and wretched.' Well, one day when there were not so many beggars, the Count looked at Mattis, and his heart ached for the beggar. 'It is sad,' he said, 'that an old, feeble man should have to beg here in the cold,' and he gave orders to his servant, that Mattis be given a Gulden every week so long as he live, that he need no longer beg. And Mattis was happy. He bought bread and herring and a new coat—in short he was a made man. But Mattis had gotten so used to standing every day on the Count's door-step, that he did not know what else to do, and a few days thereafter, when the Count came out of his house to go to the hunt, as usual, there was Mattis, standing again on his door-step. 'For Heaven's sake, Mattis,' the Count cried, 'what dost want now? Have I not provided for thee?' Then Mattis began to cry,

‘Yes, your Grace, I thank your Grace, but O, your Grace, I *was* so poor and wretched,—O, I *was* so poor and wretched!’ The Count got terribly angry. He took Mattis by the collar, and threw him down the steps, so that he fell and broke both his legs, sprained his hand, and bumped his head, and moreover he injured his inwards. Nobody blamed the Count. He had done what he could for the beggar, and he wanted Menuchah. So it is with the Lord and me, Rebbe Leben. For years I cried to Him every day, and He has had mercy on me—He has not let me starve, though, God knows, there was often not enough from one day to the next. But now He has helped for good. He has done what He could for me, and now He wants to be rid of me, for, God knows, there are enough beggars to bother Him. Nay, Rebbe Leben, whenever I feel I want to go to Schul, I bethink me of Mattis, and stay at home.”

IX

A MONK FROM THE GHETTO



IX

A MONK FROM THE GHETTO

“ Yes, it was always so, and there is no harm in it. Our Herr Pfarrer is a holy man, and Reb Nathan is quite decent,—O, yes, quite decent. In the winter he keeps the money for the farmers, and he makes no charge for it, either. He is an honest Jew,—Reb Nathan.”

Thus spoke the old landlord of “ The Gray Ass ” to a stranger seated in his hospitable door-way. It was always a stranger who remarked upon the unusual sight of a Catholic priest and a Jew walking with linked arms and seemingly absorbed in each other.

The people of Peltau had long been familiar with the sight of these inseparable friends roaming through the woods and fields together.

The older people remembered how these two as boys had grown up together; how through the short vacations they had clung to each other as though united by an invisible bond; and how they had sorrowed when sent to their separate schools.

"Thou wilt not forget me?" was then Ferdinand's sobbing query.

"I shall love thee as long as I live," replied Nathan, earnestly.

They remembered, too, the interest and excitement in the village when Ferdinand was ordained a priest, and sent to a distant province to begin his work for the Church.

They knew that the sadder heart on that occasion was Nathan's. But they knew naught of his longing for his friend, of his anxiety between the rare and irregular mails, of his pain and grief when Ferdinand's letters became shorter and less frequent, and finally stopped altogether. Nor did they know that when Nathan, through the magnificent indulgence of the Govern-

A MONK FROM THE GHETTO

ment, was permitted to rent a farm and give up his uncongenial profession of teaching, and when he married the wife of his love, and rejoiced in the birth of his first-born, he still cherished the memory of his friend, for a sight of whose beloved face he had long ceased to hope.

Fifteen years had passed since Ferdinand left the village, when one summer morning, Nathan, walking through his fields of ripening grain, heard the tinkle of the distant church-bell come swinging through the air.

"The new priest will be reading his first mass," thought he, and he hummed the familiar strain of the "Kyrie Eleison."

An hour later the priest himself, taking the short cut through the farm to the neighboring parish of Eberdorf, came walking past Nathan's house. Nathan waited in his door-way, hat in hand, to give him greeting. The priest walked by and down the sunlit road. A swallow twittered; an

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

odor of pines hung in the air; an old melody, like a wind-borne echo, sang in Nathan's heart,—

“Freude, schöner Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,”

and he gazed at the retreating figure with a strange, vague feeling of pleasure, like one who has awakened from a happy though forgotten dream.

In the evening he awaited the priest's return.

“God's welcome to Peltau, your Reverence,” he said.

“My hearty thanks,” replied the priest, and he stopped to pat the cheek of the little girl whom Nathan held by the hand. Suddenly he started and looked up from the child's into the father's face.

“Nathan!” he cried.

“Ferdinand!”

And the men fell into each other's arms.

From that day the old, happy companionship began anew. The priest spent all

his leisure in the Jew's house, and little Leah soon learned to lay her head confidently on "Uncle Pfarrer's" breast. It was well known that, if one sought the priest, he was to be found in the Jew's house. When Nathan, returning from the synagogue on a Friday night, brought a strange Schnorrer home with him, the priest's presence in the house was explained by the story of their boyhood. Then Nathan's young, dark-eyed wife would sit and smile quietly at the oft-repeated tales of youthful dreamings and roamings; at the happy reminiscences of jaunts and journeys; at the merry recollections of clandestine, woodland meetings, where the delightful, forbidden Schiller was eagerly devoured and faithfully imitated.

Time went on, and then came the winter, when the priest became strangely quiet and melancholy, and rarely left the parsonage. His housekeeper, a beautiful, pale-faced woman, known to the village as "Frau

Wirthschafterin," would often come and carry little Leah to spend the day at "Uncle Pfarrer's."

And the child returned with hands full of honey-cakes, and asked her mother,—

"Mamma Leben, why does Frau Wirthschafterin weep when she kisses me?"

"Does she weep then?" replied the mother, while the color left her face. "Perhaps she is not happy, the poor Frau Wirthschafterin."

About this time Nathan's second child was born, and, soon after, the priest was transferred to the larger and richer parish of Prague.

"It's a long way off. One could hardly ride it in three hours with a fleet horse," lamented Nathan.

The priest was now rarely seen in the village. He pleaded the burden of his new labors. Nathan grieved in silence.

One bitter cold night in midwinter, Reb

Nathan was aroused by a sound as of hail-stones against his window.

"It cannot hail in such a frost. Those stones came not from the sky," he thought.

He hurried to the window, and in the darkness descried what looked like the fluttering of garments. He hastened down, flung open the door, and caught in his arms the staggering form of a man.

"Quick!" gasped the man. "Get a fire, —quick! It is frozen!"

"God have mercy!" cried Nathan, and he lifted up his candle, and gazed in amazement into the blue, twitching face of his friend.

The priest had hurried to the stove, and was holding a bundle close to the glow of the fire.

"What has happened? What hast thou there?" cried Nathan.

A low moan escaped the priest. He lifted the covering from one end of the

bundle, and disclosed the face of a sleeping infant.

"It is—my son," wailed he.

"Thy son?" gasped Nathan.

"I swear by Heaven," cried the priest, passionately, "she was my wife, and the purest, sweetest woman that ever lived."

"Frau Wirthschafterin," murmured Nathan.

"She is dead!" sobbed the priest, and he buried his face upon the form of the child in his arms.

All through the night the two men remained together, and dawn still found them seated with hand clasped in hand.

"He shall be my son and bear my name, and I will love him as my own," said Nathan at parting, and he folded the babe close in his arms, and murmured a prayer for the beloved friend, whose form was disappearing in the mist. The priest crept away in the twilight, cold and gray as his life.

In six short years the people of Peltau had almost forgotten that little Rudolph was not Reb Nathan's son. If a stranger smoking his pipe in front of the tavern saw Rachel with her children, he would perhaps remark,—

“Strange that the dark woman should have so fair a child.”

Then the landlord and his “Stammgäste” would arouse themselves slowly, as from a dream, and one would perhaps remember and say,—

“He is not her child.”

“Who are his parents?” asks the stranger.

“Who knows?” replies the other, and the old cronies blow huge clouds of smoke, and wink slyly at each other.

And the people had almost forgotten that Rudolph was a Christian child, and was being raised in the Catholic faith. But the child had not been permitted to forget. His earliest recollection was, that at meal

time he must wait at the door until the Hebrew grace had been said. Then he might come to table, and say alone a short grace which "Uncle Pfarrer" had taught him. The other boys went to the Cheder to learn Hebrew with the rabbi, but Rudie did his lessons at home with his father. On Saturday all the people went to the synagogue while he sat outside. On Sunday the tables were turned. Rudie sat in the church listening to mass, while Reb Nathan waited on the door-step.

In the long winter twilights Rachel taught her daughters from the thick black Siddur; but Rudie sat at the far end of the room, learning long Latin prayers from a book that had a frightful picture of Jesus crucified upon the front page. The picture terrified him, for great, shining drops of blood fell from the head and hands of Christ; the body was open at the breast, and showed a bleeding heart with a dagger thrust through.

Those were dismal hours. The lonely little boy gazed longingly at the pleasant group at the other side of the room, and Rachel's motherly heart ached in sympathy.

Then, one day, the child suddenly stood before her with a white face and said,—

“The people say thou art my step-mother. It is true. Thou dost not love me.”

“Woe is me!” cried Rachel. “My Rudie Leben, my lamb! Do not heed them. The people have evil tongues.” But that night she said to her husband,—

“Is it not a greater sin to press tears from the heart of an innocent child than to let him listen to our good, pious prayers?”

“We must be careful not to influence him,” replied Reb Nathan, anxiously.

“He need not listen, only let him be with us,” urged Rachel.

From that day Rudie, with a wad of cotton in each ear, sat beside his mother when

she instructed her daughters, and gradually he crept his way into all the family services.

"Sure thou art not listening, Rudie Leben?" Rachel would cry warningly.

"Thou couldst strike me dead and I would not know, was it Esau or Jacob that had the hairy hands," said Rudie.

When Rudie was twelve years old, he was ready for the Gymnasium, and "Uncle Pfarrer" decided that he must come to live with him in Prague.

There was sorrowing in Reb Nathan's household.

"Is there one in that great, wicked city who knows how to make a pea-soup as he loves it? Who will tell him to wrap a shawl around his neck when the wind blows?" lamented Rachel.

"He is only loaned to us," sighed Nathan.

"I shall come home every week," cried Rudolph, weeping in chorus with his sisters.

The priest, Ferdinand Ulm, had a fine house in Prague. Rudolph's room was full of books; he had a wardrobe with handsome clothes, and, when he ate, a servant stood behind his chair.

"But it is better at home," thought he, and he awaited the coming of Friday with eagerness. On that day, through foul weather or fair, Reb Nathan came to take him home. That was the joy of existence. The long, pleasant ride behind old Schimmel; the home-coming; the happiness of feeling his mother's arms around him and laying his head upon her soft bosom; the sweet smell of the baking Barches; the fun of helping to set the table; the quietly joyous service of lighting the Sabbath lamp and ushering in the holy day; the interchange of tales with his sisters of the happenings of the week; the return of Reb Nathan from the synagogue; the solemn joy of feeling his father's hand laid in blessing upon his head. Then the supper, with

a separate little loaf of Barches, stuffed full of raisins, all for himself. How much better the wooden bench beside his mother than the leathern chair at "Uncle Pfarrer's!"

As time went on, the Pfarrer Ulm became renowned in Prague for his pulpit oratory. None could preach as he did of sin and repentance.

"Sacrament!" said his hearers. "One sees hell-fire and smells brimstone, and one's hair stands on end."

As his sermons increased in fire, his frame became smaller, his face whiter, and the gaze of his eyes more strange. When Reb Nathan now spent an hour with him, he had but one theme—Atonement.

"My son must atone! He must atone!" he repeated continually.

Then days came when the priest had no longer strength to preach; when he lay white and wild upon his bed, and Reb Nathan rarely left his side.

Rudolph was in his eighteenth year when Ferdinand Ulm died. He died, confessed and absolved, in the bosom of the Catholic Church. But it was the Jew's ear that heard his last wishes and prayers; the Jew's hand that closed his eyes in death; the Jew's heart that sorrowed with a deep and deathless sorrow.

The priest's death made but little change in Rudolph's life. He continued his studies at Prague, simply changing his place of residence to that of a Catholic family there. But he returned oftener to Peltau, remained longer, and left his home reluctantly.

The summer of the year that followed was drawing to its end; the school semester was about to begin, but Rudolph still lingered at the farm, and made no visible preparations for his departure.

"What's the matter with thee, Rudolph?" said Nathan, one day. "I see

that the University opens to-morrow, and thou art yet here?"

"There is no haste," replied Rudolph.

"What has come over thee?" cried Nathan. "Thou didst use to be more faithful."

"Let me stay until after the holidays," said Rudolph, pleadingly.

"The holidays! What hast thou to do with our holidays?" said Nathan, with a shrug.

The young man turned white to the lips.

"I love them!" he murmured fervently. But Nathan did not hear. He was at the door, calling to his wife to pack Rudolph's trunk.

A few weeks later, Reb Nathan travelled to Prague to hear the great Rabbi Gershon, who had come from Cracow to preach and collect for the persecuted Jews of Poland. The old Schul was crowded,

and a solemn silence, like that of Yom Kippur, reigned in the assembly.

“They have cast them out of their homes, those poor homes earned by the sweat of their brows, the blood of their lives. They have beaten, hounded, plundered them. They have reviled and cursed them; stoned their children, defiled their maidens, murdered their sons,” said the rabbi.

A familiar, time-worn story, old as the memory of man. Yet the people wept. In front of Reb Nathan stood a young man who grieved not with the resigned sorrow of long-suffering patience. He flung his arms up against the wall near which he stood, buried his face upon them, and shook in every limb with a paroxysm of grief. At the Kaddish which ended the service he wrapped his face in his Tallith and sobbed aloud.

“He may be a stranger, and one of them

that have suffered," thought Nathan. "He may be in need of a word of comfort."

Reb Nathan waited until the synagogue was empty, and still the stranger remained, wrapped in melancholy reflections.

"Forgive me," said Reb Nathan, approaching and laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder.

The stranger lifted his Tallith and turned his head.

Then a cry went up that tore the air.

"Rudolph!"

The slumbering echoes leaped forth from their dark recesses, and repeated the name fearfully among the old, black rafters.

"Art thou gone mad?—thou, a Catholic!" cried Nathan, fearfully, and the young man heard for the first time the story of his birth.

Full many a strange sight had the time-stained walls of the old synagogue looked down upon in the long years of their existence, yet none more strange than the one

which unfolded there on that day. A Catholic cried out for the God of Israel. A pious Jew pleaded for Jesus the Christ.

"My tongue shall not speak what my heart does not echo," cried Rudolph. "At mass the priest intones the Paternoster, but my heart still vibrates with the 'Lecho Dodi.' The choir chants 'Ave Maria,' while my soul rings with the mighty 'Shema Yisroel.'"

"Cease, blasphemer!" cried Nathan. "Thy father was the priest of Prague, and thou must worship the Crucified One. It is written, 'Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.' Hast thou not learned in my house what that means? Thou must obey thy father's dying wish."

"I cannot! I cannot!" cried Rudolph.

"I tell thee thou must!"

"Stick me into a monk's cowl," burst forth the young man, "make me live a lie. Thou canst not change my heart,—I am a Jew!"

Nathan turned livid, and shrank as though struck by a blow.

“Apostate!”

The word hissed from between his white lips.

“I have always been a Jew,” cried Rudolph.

“Thou liest, by Heaven, thou liest!” shouted Nathan. “Have I not taught thee, since first thy lips could speak, to worship the Crucified One?”

“Thou hast taught me to love the God of Israel,” came the quick answer.

Nathan stared with terror in his eyes.

“I—I have done that?” he gasped. “God, God, I am a traitor,—Ferdinand, forgive!”

Crushed with his agony, he sank helpless upon a bench.

The young man fell upon his knees before Nathan.

“I belong to thee and thine!” he ex-

claimed,—“ with body and soul to thee and thine ! ”

“ Cease ! cease ! ” cried Nathan ; “ every word thou utterest is treachery against thy father . ”

“ Thou only art my father , ” whispered Rudolph .

“ Thou lovest me , my son , dost thou not ? Thou wouldst not bring my gray hair in sorrow and shame to the grave ? Thou wilt be faithful . Swear thou wilt be faithful , ” pleaded Nathan .

“ Pity me , ” sobbed the young man .

“ It is for thy father’s salvation , ” said Nathan , gently .

“ Nay , for thee will I do it , only for thee , ” whispered Rudolph .

“ For his sake thou wilt be strong and brave and faithful . Thou wilt swear to be faithful ! ”

“ God help me , I swear , ” moaned Rudolph , wearily .

The light of the perpetual lamp upon the

altar gazed with calm, unblinking eye upon this nameless woe, but the echoes in the black rafters sobbed with the old Jew weeping out his pain upon the young man's shoulder.

"We shall suffer, my son,—thou and I and Rachel, my wife and the children," said Nathan, solemnly. "What matter?"—and a strange, ecstatic joy shone in his eyes. "It is for the repose of his soul—of Ferdinand, my friend."

Two years later, the cathedral of Prague was crowded one day with a great assembly, gathered to witness the solemn consecration of five young men to the holy order of the Brotherhood of St. Francis.

Among the people were an old Jew and his wife. With timid, pale faces they stood meekly, pressed against the wall. No one noticed them, until, toward the end of the services, the Jew was seen carrying his fainting, weeping wife out at the door.

"The impudent creatures!"

A MONK FROM THE GHETTO

“They are everywhere!”

“Even in church one cannot escape them!”

Such were the blessings that followed their exit.

But in the Jew's house that night Reb Nathan and his wife Rachel sat with bowed heads, and mourned like those who have buried their best beloved child.

Years have passed, and liberty has held a triumphal entrance into Peltau, and brought in its train a new synagogue with a fearful abomination called Cantor and strange, ungodly ways of Sabbath-breaking.

But few people in the place ever think of Reb Nathan or his family. Leah and Hannah married years ago and moved to distant provinces. A single stone in the little Jewish cemetery marks the spot where Reb Nathan and his wife sleep side by side. Once a year their memory is re-

vived, and a few old people rehearse the strange story of their adopted son who became a monk.

This is on All Souls' Day, when the last shrivelled foliage clings mournfully to the boughs, when the autumn sun is mild and mellow with harvest, and the earth yawns lazily under its soft blanket of leaves.

Then a pale-faced monk appears in the town. He joins the people at mass, and follows them in their pilgrimage to the cemetery. He carries a lighted taper in his hands. A wreath hangs upon his arm. Beside the tall marble cross which marks the grave of Ferdinand Ulm, the priest of Prague, he places the wreath and the taper, then kneels and prays long and fervently. In the evening, when the speeding twilight has trailed her hazy robes through the roads and streets, he walks through the Jews' quarter. The old, pious Jews are on their way to the evening service.

"It's Reb Nathan's Rudolph!" they

A MONK FROM THE GHETTO

whisper to each other. Those that watch see him walk the length of the street, enter "the good place," and stop beside two graves marked by a single headstone.

He places no wreath nor candle upon them, nor does he seem to pray. He only kneels in silence. But when the gathering night has wrapped him safe within its hiding folds, he bows his head upon his hands and weeps.



X

GRANDMOTHER SPEAKS :
CHAYAH



X

CHAYAH

Tell thee of olden times? Now, what shall I tell thee? Thou hast heard all my old Maisselè [tales] a dozen times, and usser can you young people of nowadays understand. A world nowadays! They say it has grown better. Perhaps. To be sure, nowadays a girl has a silk dress at six years old, that we got first when we were married; and grown-ups they are at ten. My word, Mrs. Cohn's Mildred is only ten and belongs already to two clubs. And learning they have, that God have mercy! In my day a decent Jewish girl learned to read her prayer-book, to cook and knit and manage a household, but nowadays!

There is Rosa Weinstein. I knew her father when he was a poor Bochur [Tal-

mud student]—she is learned, no joke that, her learning! All day she watches fleas and worms and frogs and suchlike vermin and writes about them in a book. Pui! but Reb Weinstein would rejoice if he could arise out of his grave and see how his dear child Resel puts on a big pair of spectacles and watches how a cockroach wriggles his legs! A learning that! Natural geography or some such name they call it. Meshuggas [madness]! As if anything could be more un-natural. Natural is when a woman has a home, a husband, and children. But these are trifles nowadays. Rather would she stand in the school-room and teach, “See, Kinderlech [little ones], thus and thus is the manner in which a pinchbug scratches his ear, and now take this well to heart, that you all may grow up pious and learned men and women.”

And how does that come? I will tell thee how. Nowadays the children know

everything better than their elders. If a father finds a good match for his daughter, she will say, "I do not want him." "Why?" "I do not love him," she says. Is not that the purest nonsense? In my day it was not considered even decent to love a man before one was married to him. So they go on, and wait until they are dried-up old maids, and no one will have them. Serves them right, too. What is the good of parents, if they cannot know what is best for their children?

I also had some foolish notions when I was young,—I don't deny it,—and that came through an acquaintance I had with a Mamselle, who was employed at the palace of our Count, at home, in the old country. She told me so many stories about grand gentlemen, that I thought I also must have one, and when my father—peace be to him—made a match for me with thy dear grandfather, I didn't want him. He was small, was Yaikew, and not handsome

to look at, I thought (though a finer looking man than my husband is now one need not wish to see). So I told my mother, who rests in Paradise, that I didn't want him. And dost know what my mother did? She slapped my face, big and stout as I was.

"Has anyone asked thee yet whether thou wantest him or not?" she said. And was she not right, and have I not been a happy woman in the forty-five years that I have been married?

We had no trouble at all, for my mother had said to me, "Thou must be patient with thy husband. A man has many cares and perplexities in business, and if he comes home sometimes cross and scolding, thou must not mind. 'Tis a woman's business to be patient and hold her tongue."

And his mother also had instructed him, he told me later.

"Do thou be patient with thy young wife," she had said. "A woman has many

CHAYAH

worries and annoyances in her household, and if sometimes she is cross, or the potatoes are a little burnt, or the meat tough, do thou not notice it, but be kind to her."

And so we had patience with each other, and learned to love each other, and have had a happy life together. But nowadays they love each other so that they could eat each other up before the wedding, and six months thereafter they are tearing each other's hair out.

At home, in the old country, I also knew a girl after the fashion of nowadays. Chayah was her name. We lived in the same house with them for years; we in back, they in front.

Her mother had died when she was a baby, and she never liked Zirl, their old housekeeper, but clung to me, and used to call me Aunt Mindel from the time she was ten years old. She was the apple of Reb Lippman's eye, and if she had said, "Tate Leben [daddy dear], fetch me the moon

down to play with," he would have found a way to get it.

The teachers at home were not good enough for her, Reb Lippman thought, so he got her one from the city; and she learned everything except what she should have learned, and grew up with her head full of foolish notions.

One day I came upon her as she was learning out of a book wherein were frightful pictures of bones and people cut in pieces, like a calf in the butcher-shop!

"Shema!—Chayah Leben," I said, "what terrible book is that?"

"This," she said, "is a physiognomy, and it is not terrible at all, for therein is written about one's liver and one's kidneys, and how one shall be well and healthy."

"Wie haisst?" I said to Reb Lippman. "Is that a learning for a girl, to learn about her inwards? It is not even decent," I said. "I tell you if she were my daughter, she would also learn about bones, but

CHAYAH

about the kind that go into the soup-pot," I said.

"What shall I do?" said Reb Lippman.
"She wants to learn those things."

"And if she wants to dance around on the roof, will you also permit that?" I said. But what did it help? I might just as well have talked to the wall.

Thou must not think that I am of those foolish ones who think that learning is not a good thing. God forbid! But everything in its place. What is the good, I ask thee, if a woman knows about her inwards, when her children go dirty, and her husband has to eat bad dinners; or if, perchance, what is worse, she gets no husband at all?

Chayah could have made many a good match, although she had not much of a dowry, for Reb Lippman's business was going backward in those days already. She was a great beauty,—even envy had to admit that,—tall and strong, her skin

like milk and roses, her hair black as night, and eyes she had, as blue as the heavens; but she could not find a man to suit her.

“For whom dost thou wait?” I used to say to her, “for a prince perhaps?” But she would only laugh and say, “Whether a prince or a beggar, I do not know. I wait for him whom I shall love,” just like the girls of nowadays.

So she got to be twenty-three years old, —a very old maid in those days,—and still she had no husband. Then my nephew Mordchè wanted to marry her—he was a step-son of thy great-aunt Veile,—and a nice young man he was, too; honest, diligent, thrifty, and no fool, either. He would have given his right hand for a kind word from Chayah, but she only laughed at him. I tried to persuade her to have him, but she said:

“Mordchè is a dolt! He is just like my cousin Belè’s husband.”

“Dovid?” I said. “And what is the

CHAYAH

matter with him? Is he not a good man, and is thy cousin Belè not a happy wife and mother?"

Then Chayah looked at me with big eyes.

"And that thou callest happiness?" she said. "All day he works like a beast of burden, and when he comes home at night, his first word is, 'Wife, is the supper ready?' Then they eat; and when he speaks, it is of the hides he bought, and when she speaks, it is of Maierlè's torn shoes, or Voegelè's tooth-ache. My God! and that thou callest happiness?"

That made me angry.

"Nu, of what should man and wife speak if not of their children and their business?" I said. "With all respect for thy learning," I said, "the more thou learnest the less sense thou hast. Dost think that everything is written in those books of thine? I tell thee, life is also a book, wherein one learns what is written in no

other book, and therefore it behooves thee to listen to the voice of thy elders. Thou mayest live to regret that thou didst not," I said. But she only smiled to herself and said, kind of sadly, "Thou dost not understand, Aunt Mindel."

She was a strange girl.

We had war that year, and we Jews, nebbich, were pestered and worried to death. What they did not squeeze out of us in taxes, the soldiers ate up. For more than two months we had a regiment quartered on us; every one three or four, some as many as six soldiers. We also had our share, four common soldiers. The officers stopped with the rich Goyim; some of them were at the inn. My nephew Mordchè used to see a good deal of these officers, for he used to get them their hair-oil and moustache-wax and cigarettes and suchlike stuff.

One evening he came to me in great anger.

“Why does Chayah run about the streets when they are full of soldiers?” he said.

“Is it thy business?” I said.

“Well, I cannot bear that these officers should make their filthy sport over her,” he said, and then he told me that he had heard them speak her name over their wine, and so he had listened.

One of them swore, she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen and that he meant to *conquer* her,—and what the wretches mean by that everyone knows. Then another had said that she looks like those who are not to be conquered, and then they had made a wager of it,—a large sum of money against a horse,—that he would conquer the beautiful Jew-girl before they left the town.

Mordchè was in a great rage, and was for telling her father at once, but thy grandfather advised him not to.

“Reb Lippman has a weak heart,” he

said, "it will only anger him, and can do no good."

But I said I would speak to Chayah, and I told her that Mordchè had heard the officers talking about her at the inn. She was much hurt, for she was modest and proud, and she said she would no longer walk on the streets while the soldiers were in the town.

A few days later Reb Lippman received notice that the soldiers who were quartered on him would be removed, and an officer, Baron von Hohenfels, would come in their place.

Thou canst imagine Reb Lippman's excitement. No other Jew had an officer in his house, and moreover a baron! Whatever there was that was fine and beautiful in the household, we carried into the best room, and made it ready for him, and in the evening he came. He was a handsome man of thirty-five or thereabouts; tall and built like an oak, with yellow hair and

moustache, bold and jolly, yet with the nicest, politest manners.

Reb Lippman asked him to what he owed the honor of so grand a guest, and the baron said that he had grown tired of that gypsy camp of an inn, that he had commissioned the quartermaster to find him a quiet family, so that he might have repose, since he wished to study. He did pack out a lot of books, too, and he began to read in them, but I was uneasy. That tale of Mordchè's kept going through my head.

Mordchè was away on business, and he did not get back for a week, and when he came I told him about Reb Lippman's grand guest. He wanted at once to see the man, so I took him into their kitchen, through the door of which one could look into the living room. Therein sat the baron reading aloud. Reb Lippman had fallen asleep over it, but Chayah was listening, and her cheeks were burning red.

Mordchè turned white as chalk when he saw the baron. " 'Tis he who made the wager," he said.

I had suspected it from the beginning.

Mordchè was wild. " Reb Lippman must throw him out of the house!" he stormed.

" God forbid!" cried my husband. " Reb Lippman must not even be told. He might in his anger put him out, and bring misery not alone on himself but on the whole Gass."

You people who are born in America cannot imagine how it is over there. An insult to a baron, an officer! For less than that whole Jewish communities have been plundered and murdered.

Then Mordchè thought of another way. " I shall report it to his superiors," he said.

" Fool!" said my husband, " what do they care? And what if the baron should deny it? Whom will they believe, thee, a Jew, or him? "

Mordchè saw the sense of this, and he was silenced, but he insisted that Chayah be warned, so I told her what I knew.

Then one should only have seen her. " 'Tis a lie!" she cried. "Mordchè is vexed, because the baron is kind to me. He should be ashamed to talk scandal, just because he is angry that I will not marry him. The baron is a gentleman, a kinder gentleman never lived. And even if he were what Mordchè says he is, does he think I do not know what I owe to myself? His doubts are an impudence and an insult!" and off she walked with her head in the air, like an offended princess.

What could we do? Nothing at all. I made up my mind to watch the baron, and I did, but I saw nothing wrong. Not that I feared any harm could come to Chayah. God forbid! She was pure as snow and as proud and distant with him as with everyone; but I wanted to see what was going on. They were together all the time.

When she sewed, he sat winding her thread upon bits of paper, and in the evening he read to her out of German books.

But after a while I gave up suspecting any wrong. I thought that Mordchè, being jealous, had laid too much weight on what he had heard in the inn, and that the officers were only jesting, as is the manner with young noblemen. The baron was the nicest man one could imagine. It was not possible to think evil of him. Reb Lippman, too, could not say enough in praise of his noble guest, and Chayah went about with an exalted air, like one who has been granted a vision of Gan Eden.

One day, when I went into Reb Lippman's living room, I found the baron holding Chayah in his arms. The moment she saw me, she threw herself on my neck, trembling and crying. "He loves me,—he loves me, and I am to be his wife."

I thought that I should swoon, but I had enough sense left to see that the baron

was embarrassed and angry. He had intended that they should keep it secret, and he asked me not to speak of it. I had heard that the Goyim do such things, but I was not used to that. Why should one keep a betrothal secret? I told it at once to Reb Lippman and his relations, and it went through the Gass like wildfire.

One should only have seen Reb Lippman then. He acted like one who has lost his senses. One moment he was tearing his hair and weeping; "My only child, to marry a Goy!" and the next moment he would say to himself as with wonder, "A baroness—a baroness!"

"Nu," I said to my nephew Mordchè, "what sayest thou now?"

"What should I say? His sport has become earnest. He has fallen in love with her," Mordchè said. "But a rascal he is anyhow."

"Shah!" I said, "thou art jealous,"—but I was miserable. What kind of a

match was that, a Gentile, a baron, and a Jewish girl? Such a thing had never been heard of.

“There can no good come of it,” I said, and God knows I was right, and Mordchè was right, too.

This was on a Friday. The next day, Sabbath,—just as the people were coming out of Schul,—there came word that the regiment was ordered to the front, and by dark the village was empty of soldiers.

Chayah made no outcry when the baron went, but she could not sleep that night, so I let her talk to me, for I thought it might comfort her. Far into the night she talked, and only of her betrothed.

“Thou didst not believe it, Aunt Min-del,” she said, “when I told thee that some day he would come,—he for whom my heart was yearning. But I believed it. I knew that God would not put that precious hope into my soul and not bring it to fulfilment. I knew that God would guide

him to me if it were from the other end of the world. And I knew that when he came,—whether Jew or Gentile, whether rich or poor, whether high or low,—I should leave all else to follow him; for love is greater than all else,” and then she wept softly to herself.

It was strange talk; more like a page out of the books which the baron used to read aloud, than what a sensible person would speak; but to tell the truth, I wept also. It would have melted a heart of stone to see her in her happiness.

The next day we began to hear the canons, and frightened peasants came hurrying to the village, saying that a great battle was raging just above the Black Marsh. From the moment the shooting began, Chayah was a changed being. She walked the floor like a caged beast; she would not eat nor rest, but she only moaned to herself. Along toward evening she suddenly gave a great shriek. “My God, he is

wounded—I know he is wounded,” she cried, and fell to weeping and wringing her hands. We comforted her as best we could, and I persuaded her to go to bed.

Early next morning,—it was not yet light,—Reb Lippman came pounding on our door, crying that she was gone. He held a bit of paper on which was written: “I have gone to find him. I must know how he fares. If he is wounded, I shall bring him home.”

Nu, she was gone, and we could but sit down and wait. The second day thereafter she came back. In an open farm-wagon she came, in which lay the baron, and his head was resting in her lap. We put him to bed, and got the doctor, for he was quite unconscious, and then we learned all that Chayah had done.

Into the battlefield she had gone, into the battlefield, while yet the shells were splitting open the ground at her feet. For a whole day and a whole night, far ahead

CHAYAH

of the ambulance corps, among the dead and the dying, through blood and a thousand horrors, without food or shelter, without help or protection, this tenderly nurtured girl had sought him. And she had found him and brought him out alive. He was unconscious and bleeding to death from a wound in his side; and she had staunched the blood, bound up the wound, and with the aid of a peasant lad carried him away, and brought him home.

It was days before the baron could even speak, and when he heard how Chayah had saved his life, he wept like a child.

"I was not worth it," he said again and again, "better I had died on the field."

God knows, it was the truth he was speaking, but Chayah would kiss him and stop his mouth when he spoke thus. She nursed and fed and petted him, as she would a child. She who had always been so shy of showing her feelings, now ca-

ressed and fondled him openly. She was a changed being.

And the baron also was changed. He was no longer bold and jolly, but humble and sad. It was most strange to behold. He talked all the time about how he would repay everything we did, and every day he begged the doctor to let him go.

Chayah was grieved that he should be so eager to go away, but he said he must, and every day he gave a more urgent reason why he must.

One day at dusk,—I remember it as if it were to-day, we had just lighted the lamps, —there came a knock at the street door. Chayah answered. When she returned, she looked frightened, still she was laughing.

“There is a strange lady outside,” she said, “she is entirely mad. She says,” and then she threw her arms around the baron’s neck and laughed aloud, “she says, she is thy wife!”

CHAYAH

The lady had followed Chayah and now stood in the door-way. She was a tall, thin young woman, with a proud face, and she held a little boy by the hand. The baron turned white as death when he saw her.

“Pardon me,” she said in a proud voice, “I see I am intruding. We received word that you were dying. Your mother thought that you might wish to see your wife and child. I see, however, that you are quite well, since you are at your usual business of deceiving women.”

With that she went, but the little one hung back. “I have a new colt at home, papa,” he said, but she dragged the child away.

Chayah had stared at the baron all the time. He sat pale-faced and guilty. Then she looked at us one after the other, with a face—may Heaven defend me from seeing such a face again!—and then she laughed,—’tis the God’s truth, I’m telling

thee—she *laughed* and walked quietly into her room.

Reb Lippman had not spoken a word. Now he suddenly dropped to the floor like a log. I ran to him; he lay as one dead.

“Wai geschrieen!” I cried. “Run for the doctor. Reb Lippman is dying.”

For hours we worked over him, until he showed a sign of life, and when he opened his eyes, he asked for Chayah. I went to her room to get her, but she was not there. We looked for her all through the house; she was not to be found. She was gone. We asked the neighbors, but no one had seen her go.

May God defend everyone from the terrors we went through in the days that followed!

They sought her everywhere. They dragged the river, and sounded every well. High and low they sought her, and the baron—wretched scamp though he was,

he must have had a conscience, for he sent out a searching party of his own.

On the fourth day thereafter they found her. She was wandering about the country full fifteen miles from home, and she had utterly lost her reason.

Nu, they brought her back. If I had not seen her with my own eyes, I would not have believed that a living being could change so in four days. She was wasted to a bone—bent and shrunken and haggard. One would have thought that a woman of fifty stands before one. She seemed not to know us, but stared straight before her, always with frightened eyes, and when one approached, she would shrink together, and gasp as with terror, "My God! My God!" No other word did she speak.

Reb Lippman had his death of it. He had, alas, a weak heart, and lived only two weeks thereafter, and Chayah was a forlorn creature, helpless and utterly mad.

Woe is me! It was a wretched business. But so it goes when children will know better than their elders. She might have been a happy woman. My nephew Mordchè would have given his right hand for a kind word from her.

XI

GRANDMOTHER SPEAKS:
OUR FRIEND



XI

OUR FRIEND

So thou art going to a Goyish [Gentile] wedding? Hastu gesehen—a Simcha! I tell thee if thou wert my daughter thou wouldst go to no Goyish wedding.

What—they are thy friends? How knowest thou that? Because they come here and drink thy fine tea and eat thy good cakes? Shpass, friends! I myself have seen them sit in the parlor and insult us. It is as I say—insult us!

“I love the Jews,” one said real sugar sweet. Rishus-ponim! I could have potched him. What right has he to love the Jews? Is a Jew then like a dish of meat, to love or leave as the notion strikes one? A Jew is a man like another man, to love if he be lovable and despise if he be wicked.

And another said, "I also love the Jews, though there was a time when I was like the rest of the world, who, when one says 'Jew,' think only of a man with a big nose, who cheats in business,"—and you all sat there and smiled, sweet-sour smiles, and said nothing. Had it been my house, I would have thrown them out.

A world nowadays! In my day we were not so grand. The Jew did not pretend to be a social equal with the Goy. But if the Goy despised the Jew, the Jew paid him back in contempt—and with interest. Not like you of nowadays, who stretch out your face to the Goy for a slap and thank him yet when you get it.

What sayest thou? They honor us? They go to the Temple? Pui, an honor! Well, at any rate there is room for them, for, as I hear, the Jews do not go. And why should the Goyim not go to the Temple? 'Tis a grand place with soft carpets and electric lights and saints painted on

the windows. In the loft a couple of Shiksahs chirp thee a merry Shema, and below stands a shaven and bare-headed Shegetz, who roars thee a lecture and cuts faces thereto like a harlequin. And what does he tell thee? That Moshè Rabbenu was a liar! 'Tis the God's truth,—I myself have heard it.

There is a certain book called the Thora, —perhaps thou already hast heard of it?—O, thou hast,—well, therein is written that Moses told the children of Israel that the Lord had given them the Ten Commandments. But your Chochem at the Temple says, No!—the Lord did not give the Commandments; in other words, that Moshè Rabbenu was a liar. Why should the Goyim not go to the Temple? It is a whole theatre, and it does not even cost them anything.

Believe me, my child, the Goyim do not want us. To be sure, in this country they do not trouble us; not because the laws

are good, as some people think. No,—in Austria the laws are now also good, but that does not prevent my nephew Max, who is a great scholar, from having to teach in a country school, while young empty-heads get the best positions in the cities; simply because he is a Jew, and they Christians.

Laws—Shtuss! If a Goy wants to injure a Jew, he will find a hundred ways of doing it, and yet not break the best of laws. No, here they do not bother us, because we are not in their way. It is a big country, and there is room for all, and bread in plenty. But let it once be here as it is in the old country, where people are crowded together like herring in a keg, and where, when two sit down to eat, there is barely food for one, and thou wilt soon see how the Jew it is who is crushed to the very bottom, and from whose lips the last morsel of bread is torn.

Whenever I see a Goy making friends

OUR FRIEND

with a Jew, I think, "What does he want?"—and usually I am right.

Now I will tell thee a Maissè that happened to my brother Isaac,—who is thy great-uncle Ignatz,—and thou wilt see what I mean.

Isaac used to say that the world is like a basket of onions. Shake it up as well as one will, by the time one arrives at the market, the wagon will have jolted all the little ones to the bottom and all the big ones will be on top. So it is with people. Life shakes the weak ones to the bottom, and the strong ones rise to the top, and then, lest the bottom ones be crushed entirely, they are all shaken together again.

Sometimes this shaking up goes slow, when it is called Reform; sometimes it is fast, when it is called Revolution, Isaac said. Whether this is true or not, I do not know; but thy great-uncle Ignatz is a learned man. He went through three schools, so it may be that he is right.

Moreover, after the revolution in '48, of which thou hast already heard, I saw this happen with my own eyes; when many a Jew who had been crushed to the bottom began to rise, and many a Goy who had been great grew small.

Isaac was one of those who came to the top. He had gone into business with his friend Jonas Baer a while before, but they had not done much. I beg of thee,—what Jew, in those days, could do much? He had to be glad if he was left in peace to earn a bare living.

But all this then changed. The Jews could do just as the Goyim; and they did—and better!

Jonas and Isaac soon began to do a big business. To tell the truth, it was Jonas who did the business, for Isaac was always getting cheated. And why was that? I will tell thee why. He had gone through three schools, had Isaac, and so he thought that everything stands written in books,

OUR FRIEND

and instead of looking about in the world, he always had his head in a book—and that was his misfortune.

Well, they soon had the finest store in the place. People came from far and wide only to see the show-window. And thou canst imagine, they soon began to be great folks. Everyone was their friend; even Goyim acted very nice. Why not? A Kleinigkeit—Baer & Solomon! That was no less than if here one now says Wana-maker.

Jonas used to laugh. “What do I care for the Goyim,” he said, but Isaac was different. He would talk thee a Megillah about Equality and Brotherhood,—one would have thought, he was reading something aloud out of the newspaper,—and what he meant was, that the Yüd and the Goy were now alike.

Yes, I know,—there is plenty of such talk nowadays. I myself often hear it, from your Chochem at the Temple, and

from others, and also from thy own father. But what does it amount to?

One day I said to thy father, I said, "It seems to me, that tall Goy, that lawyer with the glasses, is making eyes at thy daughter. How wouldst like him for a son-in-law?"

Thy father turned pale as death. "Rather would I see her dead than married to a Goy," he said.

There thou hast thy Brotherhood. Meshuggas!

Well, then, Isaac was all for Brotherhood. Soon he began to talk to his wife, Malka—who is thy great-aunt Regina—about moving out of the Gass.

"It is not nice," he said, "that the Jews live all together in a heap. That is what makes Rishus. If the Jew would live among the Goyim, they would see that he is no different from another man, and they soon would be together like brothers," Isaac said. Nu, gut!

OUR FRIEND

Now there was a certain Christian in our town,—Johann von Pluemer was his name,—and he was one of the first men in the place. He came from a proud old family, and they had once been very rich. I don't believe that his father before him had ever spoken to a Jew, unless it was to curse him. Of the son, one could not say that he was a Roshè. He was so high up that he never came in contact with Jews at all.

One day Isaac came home, and said that he had rented the ground floor of von Pluemer's house, and that they were going to move into it.

Malka nearly fell over with surprise. Thou canst imagine—von Pluemer! That was no less than if thy father were to say to-day, that you all were going to live with Vanderbilt.

"What," Malka cried, "von Pluemer consents to let thee live in his house?"

"Consents?" Isaac laughed, "I did not even ask him. *He asked me.*"

"He asked thee!" Malka cried.

"Why not?" Isaac asked. "He is an acquaintance of mine. I have had some business with him lately."

Thou canst imagine the talk among the people. That von Pluemer should rent out part of his house was not so strange,—it was known that he had lost much money during the hard times; some said of him that he is a spendthrift; some even whispered that he is a gambler—but that he should rent it to a Jew,—that would go through no one's head.

Right at the beginning my father—peace be to him—was worried.

"What does he want of thee?" he said to Isaac.

"What should he want? A good tenant he wants," Isaac said.

"Yitzchok, was bistu für a Narr!" my father said. "If von Pluemer wants a tenant, does he need thee? I tell thee

OUR FRIEND

something is not kosher there," my father said, but Isaac felt real hurt.

"Vater Leben," he said, "how canst thou be so bitter? Because a man is a Goy, cannot he therefore be honest? Von Pluemer is a noble man."

Seest thou, my brother Isaac was such a good soul himself, that he could not believe wrong of anyone. A child could have deceived him. That, nebbich, was his misfortune.

Well, they moved into von Pluemer's house. At first Malka was dreadfully proud. It was a grand house, and stood upon the hill where only rich Goyim lived, and where no Jew had ever lived before, but it was not for long. Soon she got lonesome, and she would come to our house and cry her eyes out. We were not surprised. What did she care for those grand Goyish ladies? What did she know about their christenings and their saints' days? And supposing she had said to

Madame von Pluemer, "Shabbes Cholo-moed Succoth my Maxl will be Bar-Mitzwah," would she have understood her? Usser a word.

"A life that," Malka would cry. "I wish I were back in the Gass."

But Isaac liked it. Von Pluemer treated him like a prince. He took him to the inn, and opened the finest wines; he introduced him to all his fine friends, and made a big fuss over him. And it was not long before Isaac was thick with all the big Goyim in the town. In the end yet they chose him into the Gemeinderath—what here they call the City Council. No Jew had ever had such an honor before, and when, to celebrate this occasion, the Chevra gave Isaac a banquet, to which von Pluemer was invited, and to which he came,—my father—peace be to him—said: "Von Pluemer at the Chevra-Sudè! Now the Meshiach can come right away." And it was really as if the world were turned on its head.

OUR FRIEND

Well, so Isaac was a Councillor, and hobnobbed with all the big Goyim. Thou mayest be sure it made plenty of Rishus among some of them, and plenty of hard talk. Some even said that Isaac was buying those favors from von Pluemer, and paying well, too. But Isaac let them talk. He went about with his head in the clouds. In those days he was a proud and happy man.

Malka began to notice after a while that Isaac was getting rather close with his money, which he had never been before, and once when she was at our house she told us about it. "I don't know what has come over him. In two weeks is Pesach, and he has not given me a cent yet for new clothes for the children," she said. We said, "Perhaps he is busy, and has forgotten,—thou shouldst ask him for it,"—and she did.

"Is it very necessary to have new clothes now?" Isaac said.

“Wie haisst?” Malka said, “Pesach!”

“Well, I am a little short of money,” Isaac said. “Can’t the old clothes do a while longer?”

“They can do,” Malka said, but she was frightened. She ran at once to Jonas Baer to see if, God forbid, anything was wrong with the business.

“Nothing is wrong with the business,” Jonas said, “but with thy husband there is something wrong. I will tell thee why he has no money for clothes. It is because he gives it all to von Pluemer.”

“Gives it to von Pluemer!” Malka cried.

“Nu, lends it to him, but ’tis the same thing, for he takes no interest, and never will he get a cent back,” Jonas said.

Malka was terribly angry. She was not one to interfere with her husband’s business, but that day she would not be silent.

“Is it right,” she said to Isaac, “that thou hast money for von Pluemer, and thy children must wear old clothes?”

“What!” Isaac cried, “dost thou begrudge that I help a friend in need?” And then he made her a speech an hour long, and the sum of it was, that von Pluemer is his best and closest friend; that with him he would share all he has, as with a brother; that even if he were not his friend, still would he honor him and help him, for he is the kind of man through whom would come this Brotherhood business and such-like as he was ever talking about. In short, the world had not yet seen such a noble man as was von Pluemer.

Well, Malka had to hold her tongue, and she got no money, either.

One day, not long after Pesach, Malka came running to our house weeping and wringing her hands. “Lace he wants to make,” she kept on crying, “lace he wants to make.” We thought she had gone meshuggè.

“For God’s sake, Malka,” I cried, “hast lost thy senses?”

"Nay, not I, but *he*," she cried, and then she told us. Isaac had told her that he was going to sell out his share of the business, and with the money open a lace-making factory together with von Pluemer.

We all stood as if the lightning had struck us. Imagine it!—a man with a wife and three young children; a man with a fine, blooming business, to risk his all in a wild speculation,—would one believe that?—a man who had gone through three schools?

But that is really what he had planned to do. And he and von Pluemer knew as much about lace-making as I know about tight-rope walking.

Well, we tried to talk it out of him. We might just as well have talked to the wall. To all that we said he only replied, "I have promised von Pluemer,—so there's an end of it."

But Malka would not rest. She ran to

Jonas Baer to see if he could not hinder it. At first Jonas would not listen.

“I cannot help it,” he said.

“Thou *must* help,” Malka said. “Is a partnership then such a loose thing that one can break it up when one has a mind to?”

“If he does not wish to stay with me, I shall not hold him,” Jonas said.

“But I beg of thee to hold him,” Malka cried. “He will later come to his senses and thank thee. For God’s sake, Jonas, if he should lose all, what then?”

Well, Jonas saw the sense of this. He said he would help her. He and Isaac had made a contract by which they agreed to remain together for ten years, during which time neither was permitted to engage in another business. Only six years of this time were past, so there were four more for the partnership to run.

Nu, why should I tell thee a long story? They had a terrible quarrel. They even

went to law about it. Jonas would not yield. In the end Isaac had to tell his friend von Pluemer that his partner held him to their contract, and their lace-making plans had fallen through. But that was not all. Jonas also refused to let Isaac borrow any more money from the business. He had in a short time overdrawn his account by more than five thousand Gulden, all of which he had given to von Pluemer without interest and without security. Jonas made up his mind to stop this, and he did.

From that time on von Pluemer was a changed man to Isaac. He did not make open enmity with him—Shpass! he owed him nearly ten thousand Gulden,—but he would have nothing more to do with him.

When they met, he gave Isaac a cold nod, and made a face like injured innocence. And as von Pluemer did, so did the other Goyim. They invited him to no more wine parties; in the Council they ig-

nored him, and shamed him by saying bitter things about the Jews, and everywhere they made him feel he was not wanted. Isaac grieved terribly. One would have thought that now he would see what nonsense was all this Brotherhood business, but, no, Isaac never blamed the Goyim. They are perfectly right, he said, if they despise the Jews. The Jews deserve all the Rishus there is, and more. When the Goy gives him friendship and shows him honor, how does he requite it? With ingratitude, he said.

In those days he was the biggest Roshè, and Jonas, nebbich, had to bear the brunt of it.

Well, one morning early, as Malka raised the curtains of her window, she saw some people standing outside, pointing and looking at the house-door. Isaac went to see what was the matter. There on the door hung a big placard and on it was written this:

“If the Jew, Isaac Solomon, does not move out of this honest Christian house, he will suffer the consequences.”

Malka came running to our house to tell us about it, but we had already heard it. It went through the Gass like wildfire. Isaac was white with anger, she said, but he had said nothing, and had thrown the placard into the fire.

About three days later the same thing happened again, only this time the placard was different. It said:

“If the Jew, Isaac Solomon, and his dirty brood do not move out of this honest Christian house, he will get his head broken.”

Malka was dreadfully frightened. She begged Isaac to move away. She hated the house any way, where she had nothing but unhappiness, but Isaac said, No,—he would not be driven away by such a miserable coward.

A few days thereafter there was again a

OUR FRIEND

placard on the door, and this time it was more vile than the one before. It got to be a perfect scandal in the town. People got up early in the morning on purpose to look at Isaac's house-door, and whenever there was one of those vile placards there, the folks would be awakened by shouts of laughter.

We wondered and wondered who this evil-doer might be. We tried hard to catch him. Night after night Isaac and Malka sat up, and one whole night Isaac stood in the arch-way of a door across the street watching for him; but on such nights as they watched, there was never a placard, and perhaps the very next night there would again be one.

At last, one day Isaac went upstairs to von Pluemer, and told him that though he hated to be driven away by the coward who threatened him, still he would rather move than have von Pluemer annoyed with the scandal.

“Nu, what did he say?” we asked when he came down.

“He said I should do as I pleased. He would not bid me go, so long as I wished to remain,” Isaac said, and then he began to rave again about what a fine and noble man von Pluemer was.

“Shpass! noble!” Malka said. “Should he perhaps tell a man to whom he owes ten thousand Gulden to get out of his house?”

One morning there was again a placard on the door, and this time it said, that if the Jew did not move within a week he would be shot dead.

Malka was nearly dead with fright, but Isaac was not afraid. He had but one wish, and that was to find the man and see him face to face.

The next morning Isaac said he was going to Prague on business; so he went around and told everybody good-bye, and in the afternoon he went.

I went to their house to sleep that night, for I did not want Malka to be alone with the children. Well, Malka and I were sitting in the Stub knitting. When bed-time came, Malka suddenly said to me in a whisper.

“Mindel, dost know where Isaac is now?”

“Wie haisst?” I said. “Is he not on his way to Prague?”

“He is standing right outside of this wall, in the shadow of the door-posts,” Malka said.

I only stared.

“He is going to catch him who puts the placards on our door,” she said. “I tell thee, Mindel, he who does it has helpers, who keep close watch on our movements. Perhaps von Pluemer’s drunken coachman spies on us;—perhaps one of their maids or even our maid—who knows? But this is positive, that it is known when we watch for the scoundrel

and when we do not. So Isaac gave out that he is gone on a journey, but he went only as far as the water-mill. After dark he came back, and now he is waiting. If he does not catch him to-night, he will go away and try again until he catches him."

Then Malka put out the lights, and drew from under a bed a lighted lantern, for they had planned that Isaac should hold the man tight and then cry out; whereat Malka would fling open the door, and flash the lantern upon them. The lantern was wrapped in a black cloth that no light could shine through, and so we sat down in the darkness—as silent as death—that it might appear, if anyone were spying, that all were asleep. So we waited.

Twelve o'clock came; then one and two—we thought already that nothing would happen that night, when suddenly we heard Isaac cry. Malka flung open the door, and held up her lantern. There we saw Isaac struggling with a man. Malka

flashed the light upon him. Then we saw that it was von Pluemer—yes, the noble von Pluemer, still holding one of those vile placards in his hand.

Isaac uttered a frightful cry when he saw him, and staggered as if he should fall. We had almost to carry him into the house.

For a long while he sat like one stunned; then he laid his head in his arms, and wept—wept as if his heart would break. After a while he grew more calm. Then he rose from his chair and cried, “Pack!” “Pack,” he cried, “and let us get out of here.”

Well, we packed. Before it was yet light, Isaac got some carters, and by eight o'clock we had moved the last scrap out of that house. And where, thinkest thou, they moved to? Back into their old house in the Gass.

See, my child, that was my brother Isaac's Goyish friend. After he had squeezed him dry, when he could not get another drop out of him, he threw him

away. He wanted to be rid of him as one wants to be rid of an empty egg-shell.

What sayest thou?—the carriage is waiting? Well, good-night, my child;—take good care of thyself. But this I tell thee, if thou wert my daughter, thou wouldst go to no Goyish wedding.

XII
BABETTE



XII

BABETTE

At first thought it would appear strange that everyone should know her. She is so modest, is Babette; so small and quiet, but for all that she has attractions for the many.

For those who seek the beautiful, she has beauty in her snow-white hair, her soft face, and small neat figure; and those who delight in the quaint, love to look at her, as she wanders through the garden, in her ancient dress of gray cashmere, dropping old-fashioned curtseys to every visitor.

But these are not the attractions that make her popular. No, to most people she is a joke. They visit her in hordes, and make conversation after this manner:

“How do you do, Babette? Well, how goes it to-day?”

“Thank you,” says Babette, with a gra-

cious curtsy. "It goes very well. When one is young and healthy, need one complain?"

The visitors smile.

"Why don't you get married, Babette? You'll be an old maid first thing you know."

"Oh," says Babette with an odd little simper, "I am young, I have plenty of time."

The visitors grin broadly.

"How about your dowry, Babette? Has it arrived yet?"

A sudden shadow of care flits over her soft face.

"No," says she, sadly. Then she brightens, "But I am expecting it at any moment. Perhaps with the next mail."

And then they roar with laughter.

It is strange to think that they laugh. A little spinster of eighty, pensioner of an Old People's Home, fancying herself young and betrothed, and that she has a fortune

coming to her—is that amusing? It is not even sad. No, it is beautiful, only beautiful; for Babette was wofully unhappy before she began to fancy this; so unhappy that she prayed she might die.

Then merciful Nature closed the eyes of her weary soul, and now it sleeps, and dreams this fair dream, that she is young, and beloved of a good man, whose wife she is to be.

There is but one dark spot in this fair dream. They are poor, she and her beloved, and they must await the coming of her dowry before they can marry.

But Babette is hopeful and happy. She does not care that the people laugh. She has long stopped wondering why they laugh.

'Tis a world of mystery any way, a world where the young rule and the aged sit aside, and where those who break the commandments most vigorously, rise highest. What is the use of wondering in a world

where wagons and cars run alone, and where one speaks into a box on the wall, and, lo!—another who is in the market full three miles away replies? That is, they say he replies. To be sure she, Babette, has never heard him, but the fact remains that when one says, “A pound of butter and a dozen eggs,” these articles soon thereafter arrive. She herself has seen the butter and counted the eggs.

So Babette is quite happy. All day she wanders in the garden or sits peacefully over her knitting. Only twice does she become restless. It is at nine in the morning and at three in the afternoon. These are the postman's hours. Then she walks down to the garden-gate and looks wistfully in the direction from which he is coming, for he it is who is going to bring her fortune.

It is ten years since Babette first came to the Old People's Home, and those who

BABETTE

know her best, know hardly more than those who met her but yesterday.

She is like a stray leaf of a forgotten book which one might find on the highway. One may read there hints of a simple, homely tale; a searcher might discover the whole. But who in a busy world stoops to pick up a stray leaf; and who in a fighting world cares for a simple, homely tale?

“An old servant, past work, and doting, with not a relative in the world,” the people say of her—and that is all they know.

They would probably wonder, they who speak thus, to learn that Babette was once a fair young girl to whom one wrote: “Thy hair ripples golden like a field of ripe grain when the wind plays upon it; and thine eyes are blue as the corn-flowers that grow between.”

His name was Luke, he who wrote thus, and far back in the days when Louis Philippe was king, he wandered through

fair Alsatia with a knapsack on his back and an easel in his hand. And on a summer's day he came to the borders of the village in the Jews' street of which lived Babette with her parents.

There he saw Babette and loved her, and he told her that he loved her. But she was a pious Jewish maiden, and he was a Christian; so she smiled pensively, and wept a little; but she wandered no more on the borders of the village.

And when a year thereafter her mother said, "Thy cousin Aaron wishes thee to wife," Babette did not say nay. He was a kindly, plodding youth, was cousin Aaron, and they had been fond of each other from childhood. So Babette was well content, and prepared her wedding fineries with a happy heart.

Then came the year of the cholera, which with one blow cut down Babette's parents, her two brothers, and her betrothed. Babette was stunned with the

frightful blow. When she recovered and looked about her, she found herself alone in the world, homeless and very poor.

Then she bethought herself of a distant kinsman who lived in an eastern province, far away on the Russian borders, and thither she journeyed. Uncle Sigmund, as she called her relative, took her in and made her welcome. At first she pined as if to die with homesickness; but when there are many children in a household and an invalid wife besides, there is much to do, and soon Babette found no time for tears.

Uncle Sigmund made an open bargain with her.

“Do thou but work diligently and faithfully, and I shall keep thee as my own. And every month, God willing, I will give thee a silver dollar. That is, I will put it away for thee, that thou mayest not be a wretched being, a maiden without a dowry.”

Babette wept when he spoke of a dowry,

but she said nothing and labored faithfully.

Time went by, and what with youth and health and hard work, her cheeks began to bloom again, and she laughed as she had done before. After a few years Uncle Sigmund's invalid wife died, and Babette became sole mistress of the household. At Passover she received a pair of shoes, a bonnet, and linen for her outfit; at New Year, a dress and flannel for a petticoat. But there was the silver dollar laid away each month, and Babette was content. And she baked and brewed and made and mended all day long.

Now, there was a kind-faced tailor who came occasionally to fetch Uncle Sigmund's old coats, out of whose ample breadths he made jackets and trousers for the younger boys.

One Sabbath morning, the tailor walked home with Babette after synagogue, and Babette with her strange French manners gave him her prayer-book to carry. Peo-

BABETTE

ple shook their heads with wonder, and gossips began to whisper that the tailor remains longer at Sigmund Glaser's house over a half-dollar's worth of work, than at another's when he is fitting him a new frock-coat of broadcloth.

Babette was with Uncle Sigmund five years to the day when she came to him hand-in-hand with the kind-faced tailor, saying that they were fond of each other and wished to marry.

Uncle Sigmund had always been counted a gentleman, but he now became suddenly wild with indignation.

"Have I not clothed and fed thee and kept thee as my own?" he cried.

Babette said nothing of how hard she had worked.

"Have I not put a silver dollar by for thee every month?"

"For my dowry," suggested Babette, mildly.

“And now thou wouldst leave my poor children!”

“Thy daughter Emma is already eighteen,” said Babette, faintly; but Uncle Sigmund seemed quite deaf.

“Woe is me! Ingratitude! Now that my poor wife is dead she would leave me and my motherless little ones,” he cried—and then he wept.

Babette, too, was moved to tears. She kissed his hands, and promised that she would remain with him so long as he needed her, and that she and her betrothed would be patient and wait.

A year passed, and Babette and the kind-faced tailor came again.

“Why dost thou hurry? Thou art still young, Babette, thou hast plenty of time,” said Uncle Sigmund.

“And still we would marry,” pleaded Babette.

“Now that Emma is betrothed, wait at least till after the wedding.”

And after Emma's wedding, it was his rheumatism, and after that the housewifely arts which the younger daughters must learn; and each time there was a new reason, and each time he wept.

The truth of the matter was this, that in the course of years Babette had learned to prepare her uncle's soups to just the right degree of spiciness and to darn his socks without a single knot; and though Uncle Sigmund was not a hard-hearted man as men go, he loved his spicy soups and his easy socks better than he loved Babette, and he trembled lest he lose them.

Time went by, and Babette's songs grew fainter over her work. And when she kneaded bread, she could not help but think how sweet it were, if for her own household she were kneading it; and when she sat through the long winter evenings knitting socks, she could not help but wish yearningly that it were for her kind-faced tailor that she knit them.

After a while the tailor moved to another town. Then he ceased to write. Then came word that he had gone to America; and then that he had taken himself a wife in the New World.

Babette gave her uncle not a word of reproach, for with the years he had grown childish and ill. But the life went quickly out of her hair, the light out of her eyes. Silently she packed into the bottom of her kist all the household linen she had stitched through the long years; but when she laid among it the pattern of a baby's cap which she had once cut out of a paper, she wept bitterly.

Babette now grew rapidly old. She lay and trembled in the long nights, for the future loomed a dark waste before her. Uncle Sigmund would die, and she would be left alone. His children, whom she had raised, were all married and away. Moreover they were of a strange kind. They ate the forbidden, and broke the Sabbath, and

BABETTE

they disliked Babette, because of a secret fear lest their father should remember her too kindly in his will.

Then Babette would think of the silver dollars which lay in the strong-box for her, and how these would sustain her in her old age; and in the dark sea of the future these were to her like friendly harbor lights.

At last, one day Uncle Sigmund went to sleep to wake no more. Then came the children and grandchildren to divide the small inheritance; but Babette stood aside.

When each had received his share, they looked about them, and saw Babette.

"What shall we do with Babette?" they cried and shrugged their shoulders and lifted their eyebrows. "What shall we do with her? She is old."

Then Babette summoned all her pride.

"I will trouble none of you," she said. "Give me but my money and I will go my ways."

“Thy money! What money? There is no will.”

“You will find it in the strong-box,—a silver dollar a month—there must be more than five hundred of them. It was to have been my dowry,” she added softly.

At this they put up a great laugh. Babette and a dowry! It was most amusing.

“Do thou but fetch a husband,” said the eldest, “and as I live, we will provide the dowry.”

Babette could only moan and wring her hands. And again she lay and trembled in the long nights. Again the future loomed a dark sea before her, waste and shoreless now, the harbor lights were out.

Then, one long sleepless night, an awful terror possessed her. She was too old to enter into a new service. No one would take her for a servant. What if they should give her over to public charity! Her terror made her bold.

“Five and forty years have I served this

BABETTE

house faithfully," she cried, "and now will you cast me off?"

"For heaven's sake, don't be dramatic. Who speaks of casting thee off? The money is not here, but thou wilt be provided for," they cried.

Then followed a family council, where each disclosed some untoward circumstance which prevented him from taking care of her. Babette waited with madly beating heart until the youngest there,—a granddaughter of Uncle Sigmund,—who was married and lived in America, said she would take her with her, since servants were hard to get in the States. And that is how in her old age Babette came to go to the New World.

Then with fainting spirit and work-weary hands she began again her old-time labors: to tend little children, to cook and bake and mend and make. But it was not for long, for after a few years her body grew too weak for work, her eyes could

no longer follow the seam, and she began to forget how much yeast goes to a baking.

One day Babette fell ill and would not mend for weeks. They took her to the hospital. When she was better, her mistress came and told her that she had a new servant, and that upon her application Babette was to be admitted to the Old People's Home.

"A pleasant place, Babette," said she, "where they give thee meat and drink without pay, and where thou mayest sit with thy hands in thy lap all day long."

Babette was dazed with her misery. The dreaded thing had come to pass. She was given over to charity. She could but hide her withered face and sob in the bitterness of her woe.

They took her to the Home; and the air that she breathed there was to her as fumes of fire; and the bread that she ate was as gall. For months they thought she would die, and she prayed that she might die.

BABETTE

It was then that Nature, more merciful than Man, closed the eyes of Babette's soul, and it fell asleep, and began to dream the fair dream that she was young and beautiful and beloved of a good man whose wife she was to be.

Any fine day you wish, you may see her, sitting peacefully in the garden with her knitting. Only at nine in the morning and at three in the afternoon does she grow restless. These are the postman's hours. Then she walks down to the garden-gate, and looks wistfully in the direction from which he is coming. When he arrives, she curtsseys politely.

"Have you anything for me to-day?" says she.

"Not to-day, Babette," says the postman.

"I am expecting a fortune," says Babette.

"I'm glad to hear it," says the postman.

"Perhaps it will come to-morrow."

"It surely will."

Then Babette rises on tiptoe, and the postman bends to hear.

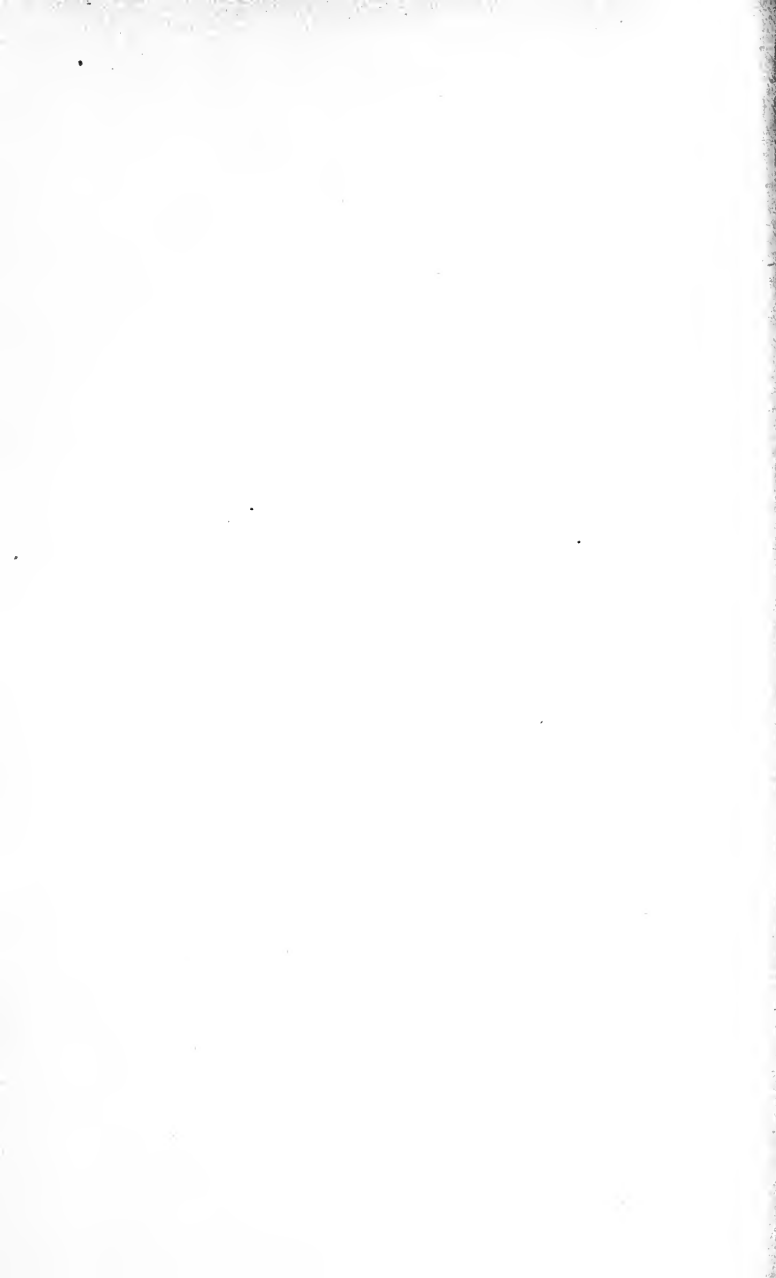
"When it arrives," whispers she, with an odd little simper, "I am to be married."

"You don't say so!" cries the postman.

Then they smile and nod at each other, and the postman goes whistling down the street, and Babette goes back to her knitting.

XIII

THE BEAST



XIII

THE BEAST

"Herr Doctor!" called a voice from the top of the stairs. "Quick, quick! Old Feigel is dead!"

"Don't be a fool, Braun," cried Dr. David, the superintendent of the Jewish Old People's Home, from his office at the foot of the stairs. "I've just been in Feigel's room. He's eating his dinner."

"No, he isn't," shouted Braun, in response. "He's sitting with his head in the pudding dish."

This last argument seemed convincing, for Dr. David started out of his chair, and bounded up the stairs, three at a time, followed by a string of the inmates who had been called from their dinner by the unusual noise. The old ladies, less agile of limb, though not a whit less inquisitive, remained below discussing the matter.

"What," said Frau Braun, a buxom matron of sixty-five, a very infant in the Home, "did he say Feigel is dead? I don't believe it. He can't die."

"I don't believe it either," declared Frau Boshwitz, who in the prime of her seventy years felt secure of the Grim Reaper. "That beast! He can't die!"

"You're right," cried a dozen voices. "That beast can't die."

"Where would he go to?" said Frau Levi, with a shrug. "He's too wicked to go to heaven, and they'd even throw him out of Gehinnom [hell]!" Frau Levi was a cynic, a little dried up woman, who in defiance of feminine weakness declared she was a hundred years old.

"Nu," said Babette, a delicate maiden of eighty, who lived in the happy delusion that she was young and handsome and courted by all the good-looking men in the home, "nu, he might be worse."

"Worse!" shrieked Frau Neuman. "He

is the biggest Grobian [brute] in the world."

"I should say so," said Frau Lieblich, who was quarrelsome and one-eyed and bearded and in every other manner belied her name. "Only yesterday when I brought him his linen he swore at me; one should have heard him, and he told me to get out of his sight."

"Can he help it, if he don't like the sight of a woman?" said Babette. "We all have our likes and dislikes." Babette had passed into childhood again ere yet she had reached the pessimism of old age.

"You needn't talk," said Frau Boshwitz. "How long is it since he threw you out of the room?"

"You mean when he was sick, and I carried him his soup?" asked Babette.

"I see, you remember," laughed Frau Boshwitz.

"He didn't throw me out," declared Babette.

"What! Didn't he swear at you and tell you to get out of the room?" insisted the old lady.

"Well," answered Babette, "should he tell me to take a seat when he wants to be alone?"

"And he threw a pillow at you," put in Frau Lieblich.

"That shows he has a good heart; it might have been his boots," said Babette.

"Babettchè is right," said Frau Levi, drily. "Judge a man by what he throws at you."

"He's a beast," said the other old ladies.

Meanwhile Dr. David found that what Braun had said was true. Old Feigel sat by the open window. Outside the apple-boughs were dripping with blossoms and bird-notes. A soft breeze stirred the old man's hair. The sunlight gleaming through the trees threw a shadow like spotted veiling over him. Budding spring smiled in at the window, and cast its warm

hope in vain upon the dead man. He sat with his dinner tray before him, his head dropped forward upon his plate, his fork clutched tightly in his hand.

"He is dead," said Dr. David, gently raising the old head. They carried him to his bed and left him to the doctor and his assistants.

"How did you find it out?" the old men clamored of Braun when they were out of the room. Braun threw up his head. For once in his life he was a hero. "I left the table early," he said, "and as I passed Feigel's room, 'Wait,' thinks I, 'he calls me a new name every time I open the door when he's eating. I wonder what he'll call me to-day,' and I open the door, and there he sits with his head in the pudding dish. 'What,' I thinks, 'Feigel so far forgets a good pudding as to put his head into it? The Fresser! He must be crazy or dead,' and when he didn't call me a name, thinks I, 'He's dead!' and

you see I was right," and Braun plumed himself not a little on his sagacity.

"He deserved his name—a beast!" said Schmaltz, the philosopher of the Home. "As he lived, so he died—with a fork in his hand."

The coming of the undertaker always brought an air of solemn festivity into the house. The women put on their good dresses; the men began to brush their black coats. Babette pinned a black ribbon into her Sabbath cap, and wondered if it became her complexion.

A death was not an unusual or entirely unpleasant occurrence in the Home. It brought with it some excitement, a pleasant melancholy, extra rations of wine and brandy, and cups of hot coffee at three in the afternoon. It renewed, indeed, the sad reminder that all flesh is grass, but each bore within him an undefined feeling that some way or somehow he would be overlooked in Death's harvest. Thus, pleasant-

ries as to who would be next were discussed freely and with humor.

In the evening a company of the old folks were gathered around Lewin by the fire. Lewin was the first inmate of the Home. He knew everything that was to be known about every man and woman there. At such an occasion as this his reminiscences were much sought after.

"I well remember when Feigel came," he said to his eager listeners. "It was eight years in the winter. A policeman found him one night lying on a bench in the park. He was frozen and starved, and they had to take him to the hospital. When he got better, they asked him why he hadn't gone to the Relief Society, and he said he was no beggar."

"Shpass—grossartig!" "An old humbug!" "Who knows if he was not something worse," the old people put in sneeringly.

"Well, he had to come to the Home

whether he wanted to or not," Lewin continued. "But talk about a thick head! Not a word could they get out of him. He told his name and age, and that he came to Chicago from Europe two years ago; that he couldn't make a living, and so came East again. But when they asked him if he was married, or had any relatives, he said it was none of their business, and when they said that they couldn't take him in unless he answered their questions, he said that he never asked to be took in, didn't want to be took in, and if they didn't want him, they should leave him. Well, what could they do? They had to take him anyhow, and to this day they don't know any more about him. I tell you, they've had a time with him. No one but our Frau Doctor Leben would ever have had the patience. From the very start he refused to eat with us. The Chutzpah! Did he think we were swine? Had to have his meals in his own room like a prince, and,

big Fresser that he was, he was so stubborn, he'd rather have starved than eat down stairs. Well, for the first six months one could stand it, but after that it began to get so terrible, that if it wasn't for the patience of Frau Doctor Leben, they'd have thrown him out. The biggest trouble was, he couldn't bear the sight of a woman. When the servant girl came to fix his room, he'd throw the furniture at her. Who would stand that? The girls left as soon as they came, and Frau Doctor had her time. She had to hire a man to fix his room. There he staid from morning till night. Nu, why should I talk? You all know it as well as I do. In the eight years that he was here, not a good word did he have for anyone, or, if he did, I never heard it. No one wrote to him; no one came to see him or sent him anything, and he never spoke about anyone to anybody. God alone knows who he was. He might have been a thief or a house-breaker, or perhaps a

Meshummed [apostate], who knows? For my part, I wouldn't swear to it that his name was Feigel. How do you know? Because he said so? That's no sign. I know what his name was—Fresser was his name, and Beast. For the only thing that he liked to do was to eat."

The conversation then became general, and every one had some incident to relate, when they had been insulted by the Beast.

"My mother selig always said that one should not speak bad of the dead," Babette finally put in.

"Then we'd all have to hold our tongues to-day," laughed Lewin.

"He had a good heart," continued Babette, in his defense, "else why didn't he throw his boots at me? It was only a soft pillow."

The company smiled indulgently, as one smiles at the nonsense of a child.

"I wonder what our Rebbe [rabbi] will say," said Frau Levi, the cynic. "I've

heard many funeral sermons in this house," she continued, "and for every one he had something good to say. But if he can find a good word for Feigel, I'll bite my nose off." In Frau Levi's case this feat was not so impossible as one might suppose.

"Really," put in Lewin, "I'm inquisitive, too. Our Rebbe is the smartest man in the world, but if he can say a good word for Feigel, he's smarter than I think he is."

The idea of the rabbi's saying anything good of the "Beast" amused the company, and they dispersed in great good humor.

The day of the funeral arrived. All the inmates of the house were gathered in the parlor around the plain coffin. A few of the Trustees of the Home were also there. Dr. and Mrs. David stood up as chief mourners. Before them lay the corpse of the old man, yet every eye was dry. Solemnly the words of the funeral service fell

from the lips of the old rabbi. When it was ended, he raised his head to speak.

“Before us lies all that remains of the departed Aaron Feigel,” he said in slow and solemn tones. “In the distant Fatherland stood his cradle. Here in the Old People’s Home stands his coffin. Between them roll eighty-six years—a sea of time, a sea with its high waves and deep abysses; a sea with calm and storm; a sea with its ebb and tide; a sea upon which he embarked an innocent child, and in whose remorseless tossings he was shipwrecked. In this small haven was his last refuge. Who is there here that dare judge him! Who can measure the sufferings of a life-time,—the bitterness of soul, the despair of the heart! May God in the better life grant him the peace which He denied him on earth. May He there kindle anew the flame of love which still flickered within his bosom. For it had not died, my friends.

THE BEAST

In the storm of his life he bore with him a talisman. It was the warmth of his heart, the strength of his fainting soul, the last spar to which he clung in his shipwreck. It was healing balm to his wounded breast, solace in his night of despair, the last link which bound him to his fellow-men. Behold, my friends, the charm, the fuel which kept alive the dying flame of love."

The rabbi stretched forth his hand. In it lay—a baby's shoe, a tiny thing knit of wool that had once been white, and was now turned yellow with age. It was tattered and torn, and a hole in the front showed where a little toe had stubbed it through. The rabbi stooped over the coffin, and laid the faded rag in the dead man's breast.

"As in life, so in death shall it rest upon thy bosom," he said softly. "He who maketh peace in His heavens high, may He also bestow peace upon us and all Israel."

A RENEGADE AND OTHER TALES

The men were wiping their spectacles.
The women wept openly though silently.

“Poor Feigel,” sobbed Babette. “I knew he had a good heart, else why didn’t he throw his boots?”

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